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Weird Tales

THE BLACK GARGOYLE

By HUGH B. CAVE

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CLARK ASHTON SMITH
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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

"He came in on his hands and knees. His mouth was twitching, his features unpleasantly white."

The Black Gargoyle

By HUGH B. CAVE

A tale of goose-flesh horror in the jungles of Borneo—a story of stark terror and the strange doom of an evil white man

GOMEZ was in charge of the jungle garrison at Long Tjuo—*controlleur* if you like official titles better—when Martin Gow and I stopped there on our way up the Mahakam. We were heading for the Upper Merasi, there to meet Langerford, the leader of our expedition, and push on into Iban territory. We were in no hurry, of course. Museum expeditions never are. And after that gruelling journey up the Mahakam, from Samarinda, we were glad enough to accept Gomez's invitation to lie up for a while.

That was the queer thing about Gomez. He meant well. He would have given a complete stranger his own private quarters and the last bottle of whisky in his

quinine cabinet. But you simply couldn't like him for it. In some blundering fashion of his own, he made you feel uneasy and furtive, and downright hostile. You looked at his fat, flabby face and at his unwashed whites and the matted hair on his chest, and you felt—well, as if some black, bloated leech had suddenly adhered to your clothing. And his eternal grin was positively gruesome after ten minutes.

The grin was the first thing I really hated about the man. We had to endure it through dinner that first night, and I could feel it eating into me. It was as hideous as gangrene. Martin and I would certainly have got up and walked out of the residency on some pretext or another, if young Trellegen and his charming wife had not been at the table—especially when Gomez began his story-telling.

I am convinced now that the man was diseased. There was something mentally wrong with him—some maggot of morbidity boring into his brain. He delighted in horror; in enacting it, in describing it, in visualizing it—but always with that grin.

There was triumph in the grin, and exultation, and eagerness. For an hour the man sat there with a cup of tea in one hand and a spoon in the other, and a half-eaten durian on the plate before him, while he blurted tales that made my innards turn. Stories of his own doings, mind you.

He told us, for example, how he had once hung a native murderer in a mangrove swamp, lowering the poor devil inch by inch into the water with a great stone bound to his legs. How he had shot another wrong-doer with a Luger, and a dum-dummed bullet, from a distance of six inches. He told us how he had whipped old Giana, the village *blian* or witch-man, to death three months ago, and then hacked off the man's head with an ordinary table-knife, as an example to other Dyaks who might aspire to the forbidden practise of magic-making. How—but young Trellegen's wife had gone sickly white by this time; so Gomez laughed good-humoredly and said:

"You mus' unnerstan', I have be in Borneo seven long year. It make a difference."

"Most men," Martin shrugged, "are either dead or crazy by that time."

"Me, I am neither," Gomez grinned. "It is weak men who are those things. Men who are physical weak, they catch black-water or beri-beri and die from sickness. Men who are mental weak, they go insane from heat or because they think too much. Or they are kill by Dyaks because they show fearness. Me, I am much hated, so I am safe."

He was right about the hate, though it was more terror than hate. We had a chance, just before Trellegen and his wife left, to see the system in operation.

"You watch," Gomez grinned. "I show you."

He swung about in his chair and called gutturally: "You, Monkee! Come here quick!" Monkee—Moni-oa was his real name, as I learned later most unpleasantly—was the little house-boy who served us. A slight, emaciated devil with Saputan and Iban blood and a wasp-like face, and the queer chattering voice of a macaque.

He came running from the kitchen in response to Gomez's bellowing summons. Quick as a spider he darted to the table and stood—you know how abruptly a spider can freeze to immobility—beside the big Dutchman's chair.

"Yes, *Tuan?*" he said; and he was very frightened. He spoke in a timid whisper.

"Where's my smokes?" Gomez snapped at him. "By God, I got a good

mind to break you in pieces, you thieving devil!" He snatched a fork from the plate beside him and lunged to his feet, brandishing it. "If you been stealin'——"

It was pitiful. If Gomez thought to impress us with the display, he failed utterly. We were more revolted than amused. The little Saputan recoiled with incredible swiftness, throwing up his hands and hurling himself backward. "No, no, no, no!" he screamed. "Don' kill Monkee! Monkee never steal! Monkee——"

"Come here," Gomez snarled, lowering the fork.

"You no hurt Monkee! No, no, no!"

"Come here!"

Moni-oa cringed forward, whimpering.

"When you speak to a white man," Gomez scowled, taking him savagely by the wrist, "what you say?"

"I say — *Tuan* — always, *Tuan*. I never——"

"Then don't forget it," Gomez rasped. "Now get! *Bukat!* Beat it!"

And then he turned to us, grinning with positive satisfaction, as if he had done something to make us admire his prestige. "You see?" he said. "They are 'fraid of me."

WE ENDURED him for an hour longer, principally because young Trellegen and his pretty wife were such good company. Josephina—that was her name and she was Spanish, I believe—sang for us while Martin strummed the guitar. Moni-oa crept from the kitchen to listen and to stare with wide eyes. Gomez placed a lamp on the table and lighted it, and remained decently silent for a while.

We paid little attention to Gomez after that. I think we forgot him completely until he got out of his chair and went to the window. But then we all looked at him quite suddenly, for he turned with a huge grin and said abruptly:

"It is grow dark outside, my fren'. You have wait too long!"

Martin and I gasped at him foolishly. Young Trellegen's face went white with fantastic quickness. He stiffened in his chair; and his wife touched his shoulder with a nervous little thrust of her hand, as if to reassure him.

"We can find a lantern," she said. "It's all right, Roger."

"Yes, of course. Of course we can," Trellegen replied weakly. But the relief in his voice was slow in coming, and he was afraid. He stood up, rather jerkily I thought, and reached for Gomez's arm. "You'll get us a lantern, won't you, Gomez?" he faltered.

Gomez grinned and dragged the lamp across the table. Martin and I exchanged significant glances. A lamp, to cross a mere hundred yards of open village? It was ridiculous! There was something here that we did not comprehend. Something deep.

"I can't stand the dark," Trellegen blurted with astonishing frankness, noticing our bewilderment. "I can't *stand* it—not after hearing those awful cries!" There was no mistaking the genuine terror in his voice. "I—go on, say it!" he choked, flushing bitterly.

"Say what?" I frowned.

"Tell me I'm a coward!"

"Bosh," I said. "I don't think for a minute——"

"I can't help it," Trellegen said hoarsely. "I've listened to them night after night. They've got me. God in heaven, I'd give my right arm if I knew a way to overcome it!"

"Don't be foolish," Martin smiled, putting a hand on the boy's shoulder. "It's mere fancy. Just jungle fright. We've all had it."

And so Trellegen and his wife left us. Holding hands, they went across the kam-

pong like two timid children, thrusting the lamp before them. Gomez, closing the door, turned with that maddening grin and said:

"They are frighten'. Young Trellegen, it is his first time in the jungle. The gover'men' should have keep him in Bandjermasin, no?"

"He says he hears—voices!" I scowled. "What voices?"

"It is nothing, my fren'. There are cries in the night, sometime', which are made by the Dyaks, to frighten *me*. The Dyaks, they do not like me; they would be glad to make me go away from here. These cries, they are not pleasant. Trellegen, he have hear them and they frighten him. Me they do not affect."

"His wife is a lovely little thing," Martin mused. "It's a damned shame."

"She is fine, eh?" Gomez leered. "Listen, I will tell you a story how——"

But we had had enough. Quite enough of Gomez's horrible stories and of that everlasting broadside grin. We excused ourselves and cleared out with a cursory good-night.

OUR Dyak abode, on the far side of the village close to the ramshackle shanty occupied by Trellegen and his wife and their Malay boy, was a queer combination of safety and risk. It was typically Dyak—a pill-box of mud-caked bamboo and nipa, propped between heaven and earth on hewn uprights. You entered it monkey-wise, by means of the usual primitive tree-trunk ladder. And once inside, you were exceedingly careful where you stepped, since the floor was a latticework affair of bamboo poles covered with mats of lallang grass, not too solid and certainly not free from ticks and occasional centipedes—the latter both vicious and poisonous.

We had two camp cots, one against either wall, and our own mosquito netting draped across the entrance. Beyond that we had made no alterations. The hut had been abandoned when we arrived, and Gomez had informed us, with more than his usual grin, that it was ours for the taking. A row of fleshless skulls smiled their welcome above the doorway. A dried human head, relic of a pleasant little pastime of earlier days, sat back on a beam over my head, comfortingly concealed by shadows. A Dyak head-dress laughed across at me from the opposite wall; and I swear the blessed thing really did laugh. It was fashioned of an ancient animal skin, full of lice and wriggling things, painted grotesquely to portray a fantastic face with leering mouth and protruding teeth. It spoke well for the maker's imagination!

Martin was gazing up at it as I sat down to tug my boots off. He looked at me soberly, as if I were to blame for the thing, and he said with a smirk:

"Reminds me, that does, of the old familiar fireplace legend."

"Yes?" I said. "What?"

" 'Who is in our midst?' That Johnny is enough to scare the living wits out of an undertaker."

"Quite," I agreed.

He glanced at me quickly, curiously. Then he said sharply:

"You think so?"

"Think what?"

"It would throw a scare into you, if you bumped into it unexpectedly, say on a dark night?"

I squinted at the thing and shuddered. Scare me? That gargoyle countenance, grimacing with facetious evil, would have given me the creeping horrors if I ever faced it without warning.

"Don't ever let me in here alone," I said soberly, "when I'm soaked with tuak,

or with Gomez's spiked whisky. I'd be a corpse in ten seconds."

Then I stretched out and pulled the blankets over me. Something was wriggling through the thatch, in the corner, with a noise like a fingernail scraping a straw hat. A big brown tck-tck bug was scrambling up the mosquito netting, and a skipping-on-the-ice bird was chanting outside. When I turned my face to the wall, Martin was still peering at the unlovely creation above him, and rubbing his chin thoughtfully. His imagination was better than mine.

I DID not sleep long. When I awoke, twitching, with that double crescendo of violence piercing my ears, Martin was still sitting on his bunk. He had not yet retired.

It was a human scream that waked me —a jangling, terror-choked shriek that tocsinned over the kampong like the voice of a gibbon. With it came the clapping detonation of a revolver shot.

I was up with a jerk. One does not lie still and listen to such things in the heart of Mahakam jungles. I was at our narrow doorway, tugging at the mosquito drop, even before Martin lurched into me.

For a tense second we saw nothing. No sounds followed the first two. The kampong was fantastically quiet, and the surrounding jungle had been abruptly hushed. There was an eery stillness over every dormant object of darkness that seemed full of brooding danger.

"Get your boots on!" Martin snapped.

I scrambled back and seized boots, belt, revolver. There is a sense of safety in being fully clad when trouble intrudes. Strip a civilized man of his garb and you strip his courage likewise—doubly so in the jungle!

But when I groped back to the entry, where Martin crouched defensively, the impending trouble was past. Peering down, with Martin clutching my arm stiffly, I saw a figure advancing leisurely across the clearing, holding a revolver in one dangling hand and a whisky bottle in the other. It was Gomez.

He came straight toward us and would have passed within a yard of our ladder. He walked with the exaggerated carelessness of a man who is utterly sure of himself and is saturated with a conceited contempt for any danger that might lurk behind him. Martin's curt voice, demanding harshly if something was wrong, fetched Gomez up with an abrupt jerk, as if the very danger which the man scorned had dared to lash out at him.

He stiffened and looked up sharply. For an instant he seemed afraid. Then, even in the pale half-light which blurred the clearing, I saw that he was grinning.

"It is nothing," he shrugged. "A quart of good whisky, it is stole from me by my devil Monkee, so I go to bring it back. See?" He swung the bottle up before his face. "It is just one of those sorry things which sometime' happen," he said, and shrugged again. "That is all."

He laughed aloud—cruelly, I thought —and then continued toward his own shack. We watched him until the doorway had gulped him up. Then, guessing what had occurred, we returned very quietly to our beds. But this time Martin did not sit and stare at the Dyak headdress above us. He had no stomach for further horror. And this time I did not sleep so easily. My thoughts bothered me for a long time.

I could not drive that absurd picture out of my mind — that picture of the dangling revolver and the uplifted whisky bottle, and the gaping grin on Gomez's evil face.

And then, half an hour later, *it* came.

Lying awake in the dark, listening to the irregular in-and-out of Martin's breathing, I heard it. It began with a soft scraping, sucking sound, almost inaudible, as if something or someone *inside* our hut were struggling futilely to get *out*. It came from the roof—or so I thought at first—but it was not the ordinary noise of crawling things in the thatch, or of scampering things outside the thatch; it was a slithering, sliding sound as of some wet, limp, spongy thing being drawn over solid timbers.

There was nothing horrible about it, either—at first. One hears far more macabre sounds in the jungle at night. More than once, while on trail, I have heard bells tolling where no bells existed, and steel clashing on steel where no human agency was at work. One gets used to such things and learns not to question them. But this sound *grew*. It became the writhing of a creature in torment—a small creature possessed of a human voice. For with the scraping and slithering sounds of exertion came an unmistakable groan and a sucking struggle for breath.

I sat bolt-upright. Whatever it was, the thing was directly above me, either clinging to the under surface of the roof or wriggling down the wall. I did not cry out. Contrary to popular belief, a man does not always scream when confronted with an unknown peril. I sat stiff as a stick of wood, gripping the sides of my cot rigidly, waiting to *see* something.

Then, very suddenly, the sounds above me lost all direction. They filled the hut and came from every corner, from walls, floor and roof. They were a living entity —a hundred different voices in one—gasping, moaning, shrieking in anguish and physical torment. They were the sounds made by a human being in the throes of awful torture. They pleaded and cursed wildly in the same exhalation of breath. They came from a tongue gone mad. And mingled with them, above and beneath them, was the pitiful noise of a bound body straining and twisting for freedom.

I was out of my bunk with a single desperate leap. There was a flashlight, I knew, on the little reed table beside the doorway. I stumbled to it. A hand caught at my arm and held me.

"Be quiet!"

It was Martin's voice. God, what a relief it was! Only a warning whisper—but real and human! And I felt myself drawn toward it, to find Martin lying propped on one elbow with a revolver clenched in his fist.

"Quiet!" he said again. "That's the sound young Trellegen was talking about. Listen to it!"

I was still again, with Martin's fingers compelling me. Together we crouched there; but there was no sound. Vaguely I realized that every moving thing had become motionless, every audible noise silent, at Martin's first warning whisper. Now there was nothing but intense darkness and uncanny stillness, and the rustling of our own breathing.

WE WAITED an eternity, and nothing more happened. At length Martin's fingers released their hold on my arm. I tiptoed to the table and found the flashlight. A dull click echoed through the hut as I turned it on; and a baleful eye of light played through the gloom. Then I turned to Martin and said lamely:

"Am I crazy?"

There was nothing in the hut with us. Martin was lying stiff on his arm, staring. My own bunk was empty, with the blankets tossed back and trailing the mat.

Above us grinned that infernal Dyak head-dress and the row of ancient skulls, and, farther back in the shadows, the dried human head. Nothing had been moved; nothing did move. There was no slightest sign or sound of an intruder.

"Whatever it was," Martin said hoarsely, "it's gone. It was up there, under the roof."

"Among—those," I faltered, staring fearfully at the obscene objects above us. "Good God, no wonder Trellegen is afraid of the dark! After hearing that horrible voice——"

But Martin was on his feet, examining every separate object in our abode. He drew the cots out and looked behind them. He kicked the reed mat aside. He took that ugly Dyak mask in his hands and lifted it from its resting-place, studying it intently before he set it down again. He moved each skull in turn. He stared into the open eyes of the dried human head, shuddering a little as they seemed to return his stare evilly. He moved the head and examined the wall behind it. Then, with a helpless shrug, he returned to his bunk and sat down again.

"You remember what Gomez said?" he scowled at me.

"Gomez?" I frowned.

"About the voice being the work of certain of the Dyaks, in order to scare him into leaving here?"

"Yes," I said, "I remember."

"I'll bet my last glass of whisky," Martin snapped, "that it's a lie. No native would think of such a scheme. Gomez himself is back of it somewhere. It would be just like him."

"You mean——"

"For young Trellegen's benefit, of course! The boy's wife is altogether too lovely for a place like this and a man like Gomez. The man's a fiend. He'll stop at nothing to get what he wants. And he's got some mechanical contrivance rigged up here——"

"To frighten *Trellegen?*" I faltered.

"Why not? He's a man of method, isn't he? You heard some of his diabolical stories!"

Martin leaned forward with clenched fists. There was no need for me to answer him, or to question him further. The truth was in his eyes, and his eyes were glaring.

WE WERE in the residency that next afternoon—Gomez, Martin, Trellegen and I—when Moni-oa's wife's brother came. He climbed quietly up the steps and crossed the narrow veranda and stood in the doorway, facing us stiffly. He was one of the finest specimens of Dyak physique I have ever seen. As a rule, you know, Borneo inlanders are dwarfed and under-developed, marred with unlovely skins and flat, expressionless faces. This one was keen, intelligent, lithe and sinewy as a leopard.

"Me speak, *Tuan?*" he said evenly, not at all daunted by the presence of four white men.

"Well, what do you want?" Gomez scowled. "What is it?"

The fellow's name was Maronga, and he came from the kampong Tjon-Tao, four miles up river. He was, he said, the brother of the wife of Moni-oa. Very early this morning he had been fishing with other men of his village, when Moni-oa's wife had come to him. Moni-oa's wife had told him an unbelievable story.

"What story?" Gomez rasped.

Maronga displayed no emotion whatever. It was whispered, he said, that Moni-oa, who had never harmed so much as a makiki in his whole life, had been murdered in the darkness of his own

house last night, by a very wicked person.

"Me come to ask, *Tuan,* why Moni-oa him get killed, and who him kill Moni-oa."

Gomez looked squarely at the fellow and grinned. As a rule, the Dyaks who knew Gomez cringed from that grin as from a thing of evil incarnate. They knew through bitter experience that it was a forerunner of unpleasant things. But this Maronga did not move. He simply folded his arms on his chest and waited.

"I'll tell you who killed Moni-oa," Gomez scowled, "and why." He put a cigarette in his mouth, lighted it with deliberate lack of haste, and faced the Dyak indifferently, as if it were all a routine matter of little importance. "Last night Moni-oa sneaked into *Tuan* Trellegen's house, see? Moni-oa, he was like the rest of you mongrels; he thought *Tuan* Trellegen was afraid of a lot of things, and it would be easy to steal from him. But he was wrong, see? *Tuan* Trellegen is not afraid of sneaking monkeys or anything else. He is a big *rajah besar,* and you want to remember that. Get me?"

"Yes, *Tuan,*" Maronga said stiffly. "*Tuan* Trellegen, he——"

"Right. He went straight to Moni-oa's hut and shot the little ape, like he should have done. And he brought back the whisky Moni-oa stole. I'd have done the same."

Maronga's head lifted almost imperceptibly. He looked directly into Gomez's grin; then he turned, as if on a revolving peg, and focused his stare on young Trellegen. Trellegen's face was the color of wet ashes.

"Me see, *Tuan,*" Maronga murmured, and walked out.

There wasn't a word spoken while the Dyak paced across the veranda and down the steps. Not a word. We were all too amazed. Then I think we all spoke at once; but it was Trellegen's shrill voice that smothered all the others.

"Good God, why did you tell him that?"

"It'll boost your stock with the Dyaks," Gomez declared facetiously. "That's what you need, more'n anything else. Make 'em afraid of you, like they are of me." He nodded his head importantly. "Maybe they'll change their minds about you now."

"But this Maronga," Trellegen faltered. "He might——"

"Might get nasty? Not a single chance. If he tries it, you just leave him for me. I'll take care of him. He knows me!"

Trellegen, however, was afraid. We could see it in his wide eyes, in the twitching of his facial muscles, in the way he licked his lips nervously. He had had about enough. This last was too much. He turned quickly and strode out of the shack, walking with a queer jerky motion. We watched him go. Then, very slowly, Martin swung on Gomez and said:

"You killed Moni-oa for stealing a bottle of whisky?"

"It is the only way to teach them," Gomez shrugged.

Martin held back his retort. His glare contained more words of rage than his lips could ever have blurted out. As for me, I was thinking more of young Trellegen's terror than of Moni-oa, and I said harshly: "It was a rotten trick, saying that Trellegen did it. Why, good God——"

"It is what he need!" Gomez exclaimed. Then he said, with a grin widening on his bloated face: "It make no difference anyway. Natives do not anger any more for things like that. We have make well-trained dogs of them, here in

Long Tjuo. They have learn to respect and fear white men — especially fear them."

And for that I loved him even less.

I DID not see Trellegen during the remainder of that day. In itself, that was indicative of the boy's very genuine fear, for white men in a jungle garrison are generally glad of any available sociability. In fact, I have known cases where white men have discarded every personal feeling in order to unite against common loneliness. I spent two years in Java, at one time, with a beachcomber named Gervon, and we two hated each other as viciously as men hate the more loathsome things of the jungle. Yet we remained in each other's company constantly and even shared intimate quarters, rather than face loneliness.

But this is by the way. I mention it merely to show the condition of young Trellegen's nerves. When I spoke to Martin about it, as we were turning in that night, Martin said moodily:

"I'm sorry for that boy. It's cruel, his being sent up here to get acclimated, and having to face an uncanny nothingness that would drive a veteran crazy. Now he's got double fear—darkness and Maronga. Neither one is worth a second thought in reality."

"You don't think he is in danger?" I said.

"Rather not. Gomez is a rotter, clean through, but the Dyaks are terrified of him. He showed me his diary this noon, the way you or I would show a photo album. The man's a fiend. He's mad. If he weren't a government official of sorts, he——"

"He'd be considered a murderer, eh?"

"Sadist is more like it," Martin said bitterly. "Good Lord, he's actually made a list of his various methods of third-degreeing the poor devils! Most of them, he confesses, are not original. He got them from a couple of books he has on the Spanish Inquisition."

I shuddered a little. The usual thing is for white men to stand back of fellow whites, right or wrong, in a place like Long Tjuo. The color of a man's blood does count, after all. But to me, Gomez was an animal—a beast with a beast's instincts and lust for destruction.

"He told me how he killed old Giana, the sorcerer," Martin muttered. "You remember, he mentioned it the other night? It seems he made the process a slow one, with all the horrible ceremony he could lay on. Tied the fellow to a stake in the middle of the village and put the whip to him. One stroke every five minutes. Then he hacked off the chap's head. He grinned when he told me about it. Nasty grin, as if there were something more to the story that he was holding back."

I stared at the floor. Martin said abruptly:

"But we've got to do something for Trellegen. *Got* to!"

"The best thing," I argued, "would be to ship him out of here by the first dugout."

"He wouldn't go. He's English, proud."

"A good scare," I said moodily, "might——"

"You think so?"

"Heard of such things," I said. "But look here, Martin. The boy's got a *right* to be frightened! That damned voice last night was—well, I don't believe it was Gomez!"

"Don't be a fool!"

"But I tell you it was uncanny. It was only half human. No living man, white or black, could ever——"

"I took a look at this hut of ours to-

day," Martin said quietly. "Admit I didn't find anything — any mechanical speaking-tube, that is. But the shelf up there over your head is scratched in places, as if something were pushed in from the outside. When I saw those scratches, I thought I had the secret of the whole business. It would be just like Gomez to rig up a contrivance through one of those ugly skulls, or through the dried head up there."

"And you found something?" I suggested.

"Sorry—no. I inspected every one of the skulls. Took 'em down and put my fist clean into 'em. The head, too. Didn't find a thing. The skulls are empty and the head's tough as leather. But the screams came from this hut, and Gomez was responsible. He may not have done the actual howling himself, but he hired someone to do it. You can bank on that."

"But the boy said he has heard those sounds for a long time," I protested.

"Naturally. He's been here a month. Gomez didn't need a whole month to realize that the boy's wife is pretty. He's had plenty of time to get his scheme moving. And remember this—you and I will be out of here in a day or two. The boy will suffer a complete breakdown after that voice has screamed a couple more times. Then what? Gomez will be quite alone with *her*."

I thought about it, and nodded. At that moment I wanted to take Gomez's thick throat between my fingers.

"A moment ago," Martin said, leaning forward, "you made a remark that a good scare might——"

"Cure him?" I shrugged. "Yes, it might. Scare a man half to death and then prove to him that his fear was groundless, and you make an utter fool of him. It might shame him into snapping out of it. But the cure is beastly."

Martin did not answer. He was unlacing his boots. I saw him glance casually at the Dyak head-dress on the wall. Then he muttered, frowning: "I wonder."

He turned in without removing his boots; but I thought nothing of it. Nothing—at the time.

I THOUGHT about it later, though. I woke suddenly, sometime in the middle of the night, with a queer tingling in my arm. It was a brown-and-black house spider—the kind the Malays hold sacred and would never think of destroying—running over my skin with erratic little jumps. Apparently something had frightened it, and it had dropped from the thatch above.

Then I *heard*. This time the sound was not above me, but near my feet. Perhaps the intruder had come from above, and had reached this stage in its descent of the wall. At any rate, it was more than half-way down the wall, slithering slowly and sibilantly to the floor!

The hut was pitch-dark; I could see nothing. I lay utterly still. You've felt the same sensation, perhaps, on waking in the dead of night and hearing the ominous creak of a board somewhere in the room. It makes no difference that the creak was caused by any one of a dozen natural agencies; the momentary terror is acute and stifling. And this was more. It was a combination of animal and human sounds that could have been executed by no natural agent!

I listened, and heard the thing grope its way ever downward. Then there was a thud, and something soft and heavy struck the floor. A low, human sigh filtered through the enclosure. The slithering began again. The thing wriggled

its way slowly, painfully, as if on crippled tentacles, toward the door.

For a single instant I saw the outline of it as it crawled over the threshold, framed against the lesser darkness of the night outside. It was small and round, and seemed to move on tiny feelers which could have extended no more than two or three inches from its blackish body. I thought for an instant that it was a maki-ki—that little monkey-like lemur which smells so much like a mouse and can double itself into a perfect ball. Then it was gone; the mosquito netting rustled into place behind it; and I heard again that slithering, slipping, scraping sound as it descended the tree-trunk ladder.

I waited, blaming the darkness for my terror. There was a thud, as the thing struck the ground below. Then—I swear it!—I heard a human grunt and a throaty, incoherent exclamation of triumph. And silence.

I lay there a long time, listening. Five minutes must certainly have elapsed before I rose slowly, timidly, to a sitting posture and called out, in a whisper, my companion's name.

"Martin!"

There was no answer. I stared sharply at Martin's bunk. And then I saw that I was alone, quite alone, and Martin was gone.

Acute fear took hold of me then. It was idiotic, of course. Any one of a hundred things may take a man out of his house after nightfall without being in the least significant. Perhaps it was my overstrained nerves that thrust a terrible foreboding into my thoughts when I gaped at Martin's vacant bed. Perhaps it was the knowledge that men do not usually or normally go prowling about a jungle kampong in the dark hours. Probably it was the realization that out there in the village, with Martin, was the *thing;* and the thought was horrible. I sat up and got my boots on, and started for the entrance.

And I got no farther. A scratching, scraping sound outside stopped me. I drew back, tense, as the sounds identified themselves. An intruder was clambering up our tree-trunk ladder. The mosquito drop bulged toward me.

It was Trellegen. He came in on hands and knees and straightened quickly to face me. His mouth was twitching; his features were unpleasantly white. He trembled.

"I—I can't stand it!" he said thickly.

I took him by the shoulders and pulled him to Martin's empty cot. It was impossible not to sympathize with the boy. His nerves were completely ragged. The mere sight of him caused me to forget my own doubts and fears.

"Tell me what's wrong," I demanded softly.

"I—I'm afraid," he mumbled, putting his hands to his face. "I can't forget what Gomez told that—that Maronga. I can't sleep. I've been sitting there, just waiting. And—and God, I *know* something will happen. It's so beastly dark!"

"You've left your wife there alone?" I snapped.

"Alone? No, no! The boy is with her. She's not afraid. She—she made me come to you. She said you'd help me, straighten me out. She said if I could talk to you——"

I did what I could for him. Fetched him a stiff drink and stood over him while he gulped it down; then talked to him quietly, reasonably, and told him there was nothing to be upset about. Nothing was going to happen to him. He had nothing to fear from Maronga. The darkness was only darkness.

"Only!" he echoed bitterly, clenching

his fists. "It's full of things, I tell you! Shapes——"

"Shadows," I corrected.

"And sounds! Every ten minutes I hear a screech——"

"Tarratjans," I shrugged, "on the river shore. Birds won't hurt you."

"And I hear human voices yelling——"

"Wah-wahs in the jungle," I informed him evenly. "And the scratching sounds on your roof are caused by insects in the thatch. And the ticking of unseen watches, every so often, is manufactured by a little friendly bug the size of your fingernail. Buck up, man. Forget it. We've all been through it, and it's only jungle mutter. It won't bite you."

He looked at me helplessly. Then he stood up and made a desperate effort, which would have been comical coming from anyone else, to thrust his shoulders back.

"I don't blame you for thinking I'm a fool," he said bitterly. "You haven't heard—it."

"Heard what?" I scowled.

"The voice that haunts this place. Ever since I came here I've heard it. A horrible voice—some poor devil in agony, screaming. That is, sometimes I think it's that, and sometimes it sounds like a demon shouting terrible curses and screaming revenge. But you wouldn't understand."

"I've heard it," I said quietly.

"You—you have? Then what——"

"Martin can explain it to you," I told him. "You'll probably thrash Gomez when you know the truth. Meanwhile, snap out of it. Buck up."

"I'm all right," he said, though he wasn't. "Thanks."

"Run along back to your wife," I advised him. "You'll laugh at yourself in the morning."

"Hope so," he said thickly. "I'll——"

He stopped talking then, very quickly, and we both stiffened at the same instant. The sound that came shrilling across the kampong was certainly *not* jungle mutter. It was packed with genuine terror, and it was a woman's voice.

I have never since seen a man transformed so quickly. At one moment young Trellegen was standing helpless in front of me, struggling to muster enough courage to carry him across the village, through the dark. There was nothing brave about him. He had been so terrified that his wife—his *wife*—had insisted on his leaving her alone and coming to me for help. Now, with that screech ringing in his ears, he hurled me aside and lunged headlong for the doorway.

How he got down those notched steps with such amazing speed and agility, I don't know. By the time I had reached the ground—and I was not too clumsy myself—he was half-way across the kampong, running madly.

He left me behind with comical ease. I stumbled and fell, and lumbered up again. I plowed through the darkness as fast as my stiff legs would carry me, but I could only reel after him, shouting.

When I reached the door of the corrugated-roofed house, the boy had already ripped aside the mosquito netting and rushed inside. The Malay boy was standing wide-eyed at the threshold, with both hands extended before him as if to push something away. And when I shoved past him, out of breath and grimly afraid of what I might come upon, Trellegen was on his knees near the wall with his arms around his wife's shoulders.

She was delirious. In the dark I could see her face only vaguely; but it was contorted, with all its patient loveliness transformed into a twitching mask of fear. She talked wildly, incoherently.

She was out of her mind. Her words were nothing but a jargon of moaning, screaming syllables.

"The window!" she cried, sobbing pitifully with her face buried in the boy's breast. "It's there at the *window!* Oh, Roger, it's there! It's *grinning!*" Then, in a rising wail: "Where are you, Roger? Roger! *Roger!* Don't run away! Don't leave me! Don't go, Roger! *Fight* it! Oh, Roger, don't be afraid any more. Oh, it's grinning. It's grinning at me. It's—grinning——"

She fainted then, in his arms. I saw her go suddenly limp, and her head dropped, lolling pitifully. Young Trellegen looked across her, to the window. The aperture was black and empty; its covering of netting was unbroken. Nothing was out there.

Trellegen stood up. He carried his wife to her own bed and laid her there. He was muttering to himself, in an undertone. Then he swung on me.

"'Grinning,' she said!" he rasped. "You heard her." His voice was thick, hoarse, utterly out of control. "So that's his filthy game! Trying to make a gibbering fool of me with his hideous voices! Putting the Dyak to kill me, so he can come here and take *her.* That's what he wants! The ———!"

It was not a pleasant epithet. One might have called an animal that, but hardly a fellow white man. Coming from the boy's clean lips, it seemed even more vicious and terrible. But as I have already said, I did not consider Gomez a white man, or even a man. I did not interfere.

Trellegen looked down into his wife's white face for an instant. Then he straightened very deliberately and went to the table. He opened the drawer and took out a revolver. Without a word he stood there, loading it as a man might fill a fountain pen.

Then he paced to the door. I doubt if he saw me or even realized my presence. He did not look at me. He simply walked out.

When he had gone, I stood stiff in the middle of the floor. Then, with a shrug, I walked to the galvanized water bucket which stood in the corner, and filled the shallow basin which hung there on its hook. I carried the basin to the girl's bed and began to bathe her forehead and face.

Perhaps two or three minutes later, while I sat there, she opened her eyes.

"Roger," she whispered.

"Roger is——" I began to say, and then stopped. I had expected to hear the sound of a revolver shot. Instead, I heard a cry that jerked me to my feet.

"Roger!" she pleaded.

"Roger's all right," I snapped. "He's coming back."

Then I lurched to the door and seized the arm of the Malay boy who huddled there.

"Stay here," I ordered. "No matter what happens, don't run away. If you do, I'll——"

Then I ran.

WHAT I expected to find, as I stumbled across the kampong in the dark, I don't exactly know. I thought of Maronga, who certainly intended to kill Roger Trellegen for the death of Monioa. I thought of the girl's hysterical outpouring about the grinning face at her window. I thought of Martin, and wondered where in heaven's name he was—though I should have guessed easily. And I thought also of the slithering, half-human thing which had driven fear to my heart only a few moments ago. Then I reached the door.

And whatever I thought, I did not anticipate the scene that confronted me at that moment. I did not dream such things could exist.

Trellegen was standing rigid, just inside the doorway. His revolver hung limp in his hand, and his eyes were fixed wide with unspeakable horror. Beyond him was the table, with the lamp burning upon it and an open book lying in the glare. Gomez had apparently been writing in the book.

Gomez lay on the floor. His chair was half-way across the room, up-ended, as if he had careened out of it in terror. He lay with his legs bent at the knees and his hands clawing the carpet. His shirt was ripped wide open from neck to belt. And there, on his naked chest, squatted a thing unnamable—a thing the sight of which choked the breath in my throat and tightened every muscle of my body with a convulsive jerk.

It was a head, a human head—*the* human head. It was the same horrible dead thing which had sat on the ledge in the hut which Martin and I occupied. But it was not dead! God forgive me, it was endowed with life! It crouched there, glaring at me with eyes full of triumphant malice and indescribable evil. Even as I recoiled from it, it moved. It had developed living, writhing tentacles. It was a human octopus!

Gomez, thanks to a merciful God, was already dead. Perhaps Trellegen had witnessed the method of it. I do not know; I did not want to know. I could only stand and stare; and in that moment I knew things, realized things, which no man should ever know.

This thing—this unspeakable living-dead horror—was the *voice*. Gomez was wrong; those midnight cries had not been created by the Dyaks to frighten him from the kampong. Martin, too, was wrong; those inhuman shrieks had not been flung out to make a gibbering madman of Trellegen. This, this macabre monstrosity, was the voice. It had never died! Night after night it had squatted there on its wooden shelf, struggling futilely to walk on its ever-growing abominations. In its efforts to escape, it had gone through the torments of hell, moaning and wailing and screaming in its agony.

But why had Martin failed to discover the truth? Good God, Martin had inspected every corner of the hut—had picked this thing up in his hands and examined it! Why had he not learned its secret?

I stared at the thing, and realized why. Its pin-point orbs glared back at me, full of animal cunning. The thing possessed a mind. No wonder Martin had been blind to its awful powers. Those beady eyes indicated a brain cunning enough to deceive any man. There was but one answer. The creature had simulated death when Martin examined it. It had curled its abominable legs back into its body, concealed them from his gaze.

And now it was here. Those nights of agony had borne fruit. The thing had learned to propel itself, to escape from its high prison. Those squirming tentacles had developed to the extent where they provided a means of locomotion. It was here, in Gomez's shack!

Even as I gaped, I saw the thing crawl leeringly over Gomez's upturned face with the slithering motion of a huge slug. It squatted there a moment, watching us. From its writhing lips, bloated and obscene, jangled a hideous cackle of bestial laughter, hoarse with gloating and triumph. And then, writhing its way onward, it twisted over its victim's forehead and thudded to the floor, and retreated across the carpet with the scuttling haste

of a crab with uncouth legs. It moved quickly—so quickly that it was almost at the farther wall before either Trellegen or I moved.

Something possessed Trellegen then. He stiffened and jerked up his revolver. He pulled the trigger again and again and again. The slithering thing stopped and screamed. It half turned as a bullet thudded into it; then it seemed to shudder as a second and third imbedded themselves. Twitching convulsively, it rose an inch off the floor on stiff legs—if those gelatinous, embryonic horrors could be termed legs—and then sank back again, gasping. I saw its eyes; they were glassy and fearfully wide. A bullet had entered its brain. I saw it curl up and die. Abruptly I stepped forward. My groping hand scraped the open book which lay there on the table. I seized the book and would have hurled it. Then I looked down into the face of Gomez, and I shrieked.

You have seen a slab of red, raw meat, half eaten to the bone by human teeth? Gomez's face was like that. I looked at it once; then I seized Trellegen's arm and said harshly: "Your wife needs you. Go back to her!" And then I went away from there.

I RAN wildly across the kampong clearing, indifferent to mud and darkness alike. Straight to my own hut I went. And there, at the foot of the ladder, I found Martin.

I was immune to further horror. I merely stood and stared, and then dropped to my knees beside Martin's limp body. His head was smothered in that ugly, grinning Dyak head-dress, and he was unconscious. The hilt of a native parang, seven inches long, protruded from a jagged rip in his shirt. He groaned when I lifted him. Somehow I got him up the ladder.

The knife, when I drew it out, was covered with blood. It was a murderous thing—a typical Dyak parang, straight-bladed and single-edged, with intricate carving on the hilt. It left a bubbling wound in Martin's side—a wound in soft flesh, which had escaped the lung by a matter of two inches or less. Martin moaned and opened his eyes while I was sterilizing the gash. He told me half an hour later, while he lay stretched on his cot stiff in bandages, what he had done. He had taken that Dyak head-dress from the wall, and put it on, and crept out of the hut. He had gone straight to Trellegen's house and prowled to the rear window, thinking to "cure" the boy with one good fright.

"It was your own idea," he said, smiling wearily. "That is, it was you who gave *me* the idea. You said: 'Scare a man half to death and then prove to him that his fear was groundless, and you make an utter fool of him. It might shame him into snapping out of it.' That's what you said. And *something* had to be done. Good Lord, in another day or two Gomez would have had his way with the boy. We had to use desperate measures!"

I nodded. He stared at me steadily for a moment, then said heavily:

"But something went wrong, I guess. I—I didn't think there'd be any danger. I just stuck my face against the window netting and groaned like a true demon. It was dark inside. I couldn't see who was in there. And the girl screamed."

"She'll get over it," I told him.

"I hope so. God, that scream startled me! I'm an utter fool. Forgot all about the girl being there. And then that damned knife burned into me, all at once, from nowhere."

"Maronga did it?" I asked quietly.

"Maronga. Yes." Martin looked at the knife and winced. "That devil must have thrown it. He was nowhere near me, I'm positive. The knife came like a bullet. He must have thought I was Trellegen, and followed me across the kampong."

"He also thought the knife killed you," I said, "or he'd have crept back to finish the job."

Martin made a wry face. He gazed at me soberly.

"It would have served me right," he shrugged. "Any time you're handing out medals for idiocy, don't forget me."

Then he closed his eyes and slept, leaving me to hold the parang and stare at him. If he anticipated any sarcastic remarks from me, or any condemnations, he was mistaken. The knife had hurt him badly; he had paid quite enough for his blunder without my inflicting further torment. Besides, I wanted to think. I had certain questions of right and wrong to settle to my own satisfaction, and they were not the easiest questions in the world.

Two days later, after young Trellegen and his wife had departed, Martin and I discussed those questions in ethics together and then sent our report to the authorities at Long Iram.

We did not include mention of the knife. Had we done so, Maronga would undoubtedly have paid the penalty with a sojourn in the penal colony at Soerabaya. The carved hilt with its telltale inscriptions would have convicted him without question. We told ourselves, deliberately, that Maronga was justified. His mistake had nothing to do with his motive. Any man, seeking the same revenge—and any decent man might have sought the same revenge — could very easily have made the same blunder.

As for Gomez, our report to the authorities was to the effect that he had died of drunken suicide. We buried him before we left, and we buried with him the ashes of that other thing, after we had burned it. We had no sympathy for Gomez—or with any man who could commit murder for a mere quart of spiked whisky. Whisky is cheap; life isn't.

Young Trellegen and his wife returned to the coast; and, according to reports which came back to us, they travelled both night and day. The night travel, in view of Trellegen's former fear of the dark, was rather significant and — well, gratifying. At least the ordeal hadn't been for nothing.

Finally, there was the diary. Martin and I studied it at our leisure, on the way up-river. It was a book of horror from beginning to end. Even the last entry, which was unfinished, revealed the obscene condition of the man's mind:

"My two temporary guests think I am very cruel. When I told them how I dealt justice to old Giana, the witch-doctor, they were shocked terribly. Before they go I will tell them what Giana said to me before he died—how he swore he would return no matter what I did to him. They will be much afraid, then. Even now, if they knew that the head of old Giana is sitting on the beam of their hut, they——"

Gray World

By PAUL ERNST

Gregor awoke to a terrifying gray dawn, in which there was no color, and life was terribly changed

GEORGE GREGOR blinked, and shook his head to clear his wits. He felt numb, dazed, as though his skull were filled with cotton wool that suffocated his thoughts and pressed against his eyeballs from behind.

Sight and wits began to clear now. His immediate surroundings began to swim into place around him. Consciousness took command again. One funny thing persisted, though. Sort of an optical illusion.

Everything around him, walls and familiar furnishings of his bedroom, light from the electric globes, his own hand when he held it out to look at it—all had a queer grayish tinge. In fact, he could see no real color anywhere. It was as if he were color-blind.

Well, perhaps he was! Perhaps that fall on the floor had done it. Clumsy, tripping over the rug that way. And banging his head against the corner of the table. Had the knock against his skull, slight as it seemed to be, done something to the optic nerve to make him color-blind? He blinked at grayish walls and furnishings and light, while the events of the evening came back to him.

They'd all been downstairs in the living-room — old Carfax, Gordon Fisher, Mark Seely, and himself. The talk had swung to science; and Carfax had taken the floor. Carfax was 'way up in chemistry, Gregor knew vaguely. Professor, author of several books on bio-chemistry, all that sort of thing.

Carfax had started with the old one about the emptiness of space.

"You see this chair, gentlemen? It seems to be quite solid, doesn't it? And yet, incredible as it sounds, it is actually about ninety-nine per cent empty space. The atoms composing this solid wood chair-arm and chair-back are so loosely woven that, could the whole structure be magnified a billion times, we could not see the solid matter for the holes between."

Gregor wasn't much interested. Besides, he dimly remembered hearing things like that back in his college days. However, he was host here; and one of the duties of a host is to feign interest whether or not he feels it.

"What keeps us from falling through a chair, if it's as tenuous as all that?" he asked.

"The fact that we, and the chair, and all the rest of our solid world, are all in the same dimension," said Carfax. "We are in tune, so to speak. Our atoms, and those of our surroundings, are of similar architecture; and when one body comes in contact with another, the opposing atoms clash instead of intermeshing and slipping through each other. If this were not so, we could walk through stone walls at will."

At this point Gordon Fisher, the young fool, had started to pull the professor's leg.

"Then if we could change into another

"The girl went unconcernedly on with her dressing."

dimension we could perform all sorts of weird miracles, eh?"

"Amazing miracles," replied Carfax.

"Well, that ought to be right up your alley, sir. You're an outstanding scientist. Couldn't you cook up some sort of chemical mess that would change a person from one dimension to another?"

CARFAX solemnly cleared his throat. "Such a thing is more possible than it may seem at first glance. Indeed, I may as well admit that I am at present engaged in experiments that, if generally known of, would be described as revolutionary. I'm not actually *working* on them, you understand," he added hastily. "Just keeping such experimental labor as a hobby—merely playing about with the thought, as it were."

"And you've actually had success in your experiments?" inquired Gordon, so seriously that even Carfax should have caught on.

"That," said Carfax importantly, "I do not feel at liberty to answer."

"What would another dimension look like to me, supposing you could give me some sort of pill to send me there?"

"We can only imagine what it would look like. I should say it would be a world in monocolor. Gray, perhaps. Yes, pretty surely gray. Otherwise, everything would appear about the same as in this dimension."

"But there'd be no solid matter any more, eh? My atoms would intermesh with the atoms of this chair, for example, and I'd fall through it if I tried to sit on it?"

"Oh, probably you could sit on it, if you sat down very lightly. There'd be a little resistance left."

"Why, Professor!" exclaimed Gordon excitedly. "You have a fortune in view if you've got such a magic pill up your sleeve. Think of it! 'Take our dimensional pills. No more shins barked on chair-legs when you get up in the dark. No more black eyes from running into bathroom doors. Does the good wife object to your going out evenings to lodge meetings? Take a pill—and walk out through the side of the house!' It's a wow, sir. Let me have first crack at organizing a sales force, will you?"

Carfax, who tended to be a pompous old ass anyway, had glowered. "You may laugh. But let me tell you that the world may some day be astounded at the results of my work along such lines."

"Tell us more," Gordon had begged. Gregor could have kicked the outrageous young idiot. Instead, as host, he had changed the subject.

"I think I hear my wife laying the midnight festal board in the dining-room," he had said, getting up. "Shall we go and sample some Welsh rabbit and coffee?"

And then had come that silly fall of his. His toe had caught in a loop of the rug. He had fallen forward, thrown out his arms to keep from hitting the library table in his path—and gone out like a light in the midst of a shower of stars.

* * * * *

HE GAZED around at the four walls of his bedroom. Evidently they'd taken him up here, ascertained he was all right save for the rap on his head, and gone downstairs again. But that was funny, too, hang it. You'd think some one—his wife or some one—would be in here with him. After all, he'd hit his head hard enough to knock him out, hadn't he?

And why was everything gray like this?

An insane thought came to him, only to be put out of mind at once as impossible. No, it was the fall. Something had gone temporarily wrong with the optic nerve.

He saw now that he was lying on the bed, fully dressed, just where they'd laid him when they carried him upstairs. He started to clamber over the side and get to his feet, cautiously, for with the first move everything started going round before his eyes.

Still cautiously, he clutched at the edge of the night-table beside the bed to assist himself.

"For God's sake!" mumbled Gregor.

His hand had gone through the solid wood almost as though there were nothing there! Only the faintest of pressures had informed him when his flesh passed through the inch and a half of close-grained walnut.

He scrambled out of bed quickly enough at that—only to receive a second shock.

The force of his rising sent him clear to the ceiling, where he hung for an in-

stant like a toy balloon before floating slowly down to the floor again. He had no more weight than a puff of eiderdown.

"For God's sake!"

Gregor took a deep breath. The grayness of everything! The way he could poke his hand through solid substance! His lack of weight! Carfax!

The pompous old madman had deliberately experimented on him—probably stung by Gordon's taunts—and had transposed him to another dimension! Gregor could only hope to heaven the lunatic could reverse his process.

He started toward the door, without a backward glance at the bed. He'd confront Carfax at once, and demand that he be restored to his normal dimension. Fancy living out one's life in a world where nothing had substance!

At the closed door he halted. Wait a minute, now. Maybe he'd been imagining things—still hazy from the blow on his head. He'd try again.

Slowly his hand went out toward the closed door. At the last moment he jerked it back again, panicky at the fear that he was after all in his right senses. He composed himself and extended his hand again.

The tips of his fingers touched the door. Then they went through, with his arm after it, till arm and hand were thrust out in the hall while his body remained in the room. He felt sweat pour out on his neck and forehead. He couldn't see through the door; at least it was that solid; but that very fact made the whole affair worse, somehow.

He stared incredulously at his shoulder, pressed against the solid-looking door—with his arm sticking out in the hall on the other side.

"My God! Where's Carfax?"

He leaned lightly against the door, and passed through. The slightest imaginable push had been enough to force his body through it.

In the hall, he forgot for an instant how his weight had been so inexplicably reduced to next to nothing. He started hastily for the stairs, to go down and find Carfax.

One step sent him soaring from the door of his bedroom to the head of the stairs thirty feet away. En route he would have raked his head along the ceiling—save that the ceiling offered no more solid resistance to his head and shoulders than the night-table had to his hand. For an instant he had been slicing through the ceiling, with the upper half of him in the attic and the lower half in the hall below. That was all.

He clutched the bannister at the top of the stairs when he came down, meaning to steady himself. His fingers met in the polished wood.

"Carfax!" he shouted. "Carfax! Damn you—where are you?"

He started down the stairs, carefully now, a step at a time. The very press of his toes, in their springy action, sent him up three feet into the air. But he could walk almost normally if he stepped flat-footedly.

Floating more than walking, he descended the stairs and went to the living-room. There was no one there. All the lights were on—those odd, gray lights that made him feel as if he were walking around in a gray and black and white photograph—but not a soul was in the room.

Carfax and Gordon and Seely had evidently all gone home. But they must have gone in a hurry. He couldn't have been unconscious for more than a few minutes.

He started impulsively to go back upstairs and seek out his wife. She must

be in her room, unless she was telephoning for a doctor, or rumaging the medicine chest for bandages and things.

He stopped as abruptly as he had started. No, he mustn't confront his wife in this state! God knew what he looked like to normal eyes. He might be a brilliant green, or a nauseous purple, or something.

He stepped to the large mirror hanging over the refectory table. What *did* he look like, anyhow?

"For God's sake," he moaned once more. He rubbed his eyes, looked again.

Nothing whatever showed in the mirror. No reflection of him was outlined in the clear glass. He could see the room behind him, detail by detail, as though no five feet ten inches of stocky body intervened.

"But I *am* here," he whispered.

He patted his chest experimentally. Yes, that was solid enough. He gazed down at himself. He could see legs and waist, clad in solid-looking brown cloth. His feet looked solid, and the tan shoes on them. Nor could he see the floor through his feet.

He whirled to the mirror again, vaguely hoping to surprize it into giving back his image. It was as blank as before.

"I've got to find Carfax at once, that's what I've go to do," he said aloud. "At once! What does he think he's trying to do—giving me a drug while I'm unconscious, and then going away and leaving me in another dimension!"

He started determinedly for the street door. Then he hesitated again. What *did* he look like to normal eyes? The mirror had stubbornly refused to give any hint. Was he all gray, too, like the world that surrounded him? Or was he a monstrous-appearing thing, human in nothing but outline? Would he frighten the first pedestrian he met into calling the police and having him locked up?

Gregor shrugged. That, at least, was no risk. They couldn't lock up a man who could walk through closed doors.

He leaned gently against the barred portal before him, and stepped through it to the street.

Gray and black, the night was. Overhead black as pitch save for dim gray points which were stars. Beneath, solid black where shadows of buildings fell athwart the street, and solid light gray where the rays of the street lights penetrated. The photograph he was living in now was a time exposure.

The street was deserted, of course. It must be one in the morning: it had been about eleven-thirty when his clumsy fall had broken up the party. Up ahead, however, he saw a taxi drawing to the curb to discharge a hilarious party of four. He hastened toward it, floating along at a prodigiously swift pace.

Now for the test, he thought. He'd see what effect he had on denizens of the dimension he had just left. Would they scream and run? Or would they see him as a normal man instead of a freak who moved in a world of mist?

There were two men and two girls in the party. One of the men paid the bill as Gregor drew near. The other three were already starting toward the house in front of which the cab had stopped.

Shrinkingly, Gregor approached. He was within ten feet of the bill-payer when that gentleman concluded the transaction —and turned his back to Gregor to catch up with the other three in his party.

Gregor didn't know whether to be glad or sorry he hadn't been seen. He was getting more and more anxious to find out what he looked like.

He stared at the back of the man, half

minded to call after him. Then he turned to the taxi.

The cab was already moving away from the curb—as unconcerned as though a possible fare hadn't been standing there at all.

"Hey!" shouted Gregor, as the cab rolled off. "Hey—come back here!"

The cab did not hesitate. The driver didn't look back.

"I suppose he thinks just because I'm bare-headed that I'm drunk or taking a night hike to cure insomnia or something," muttered Gregor.

HE FELT an increasing impulse to talk aloud, as one does when alone. Ah, that was it! When one is alone. That explained the dreadful sinking feeling that more and more was bearing him down. He was lonely. Lonely? He felt as though he were the last man left alive on earth!

Torn by his feeling of colossal loneliness, he stared first after the retreating cab, and then over his shoulder at the merry foursome just halting at the door of the house behind him. He took a few steps in their direction; but the door opened, and they stepped inside.

And then a new, chill doubt assailed him. Take a taxi? He couldn't do that. Feather-light as he was, and sinking through solid substance as easily as he did, the slightest jolt of the cab would send him through bottom, top or sides and into the street. He decided he'd better walk to Carfax's house.

The professor's home was about a mile west of there. Gregor started off, floating along like eiderdown borne on a zephyr. It would have been exhilarating, in a way, had he not been so oppressed by that vast loneliness, and so profoundly fearful that Carfax might not be able to bring him back from this bleak gray dimension.

And then he noticed consciously something that had been slowly happening for the last ten minutes.

The black shadows of his photographic world were gradually losing some of their solidity. From black to dark gray, and from dark to lighter gray, they were changing. Also the sky above was losing its inky darkness. It was lightening more and more—and the change was taking place at the east!

"Dawn," whispered Gregor, eyes wide and startled. *"Dawn!"*

But it couldn't be. Dawn came at about four-thirty at this time of year. And it had been not quite midnight when they had that talk in the living-room—that talk that was to lead Carfax to such experimental madness.

Nevertheless, it was dawn. He could see a tip of the sun coming up now—a blinding rim of pearl-gray light. Why, he had been unconscious for hours! Yet he had come to, back in his bedroom, to find himself alone. It was inconceivable that his wife had left him by himself while he was still unconscious. Or had he stirred to a few moments of rational-sounding delirium that had convinced every one he was all right, and settled back into a coma after they'd left him? But he couldn't have done that. He hadn't hurt himself as severely as that. Or had he?

A frightful fear shot through him. Maybe he'd fractured his skull. Maybe he wasn't here in the street at all, but was back in bed, raving and being held by doctors and nurses. Or maybe—he was mad.

However, this fear had short duration. As it had done several times before, his hand strayed to his temple, which had been the part of his head to strike the table. No, there wasn't even a bump there. He had not hurt himself badly—

and he wasn't mad. Mad people do not question their own sanity.

The only possible answer was Carfax. Carfax and his damned drug. He could picture the whole thing: himself lying on the bed, his wife bent anxiously over him, Carfax pompously clearing his throat.

"Here, let me give him this drug. It's a heart stimulant. It may help."

Gregor swore savagely, and started at a swifter pace toward Carfax's home. He'd make Carfax undo what he'd done, by heaven—or he'd kill him!

A lone, hatless figure in the gray dawn, he wafted over a sidewalk into which his feet tended to sink like soft mud; in the world but not of it; an exile in the misty, dreadfully unfamiliar plane to which Carfax's infernal drug was the doorway.

Now, with the beginning of day, a stirring of life was evident.

A newsboy, hauling a little wagon on which were piled his papers, appeared around the corner ahead of Gregor and started toward him, halting before every house to roll a newspaper and throw it at the door.

The sight was good. Gregor's fear, his abysmal loneliness, accentuated by the natural desertion of the streets at daylight, made him hungry to see any sort of human life.

But the boy seemed too busy with his affairs to pay any attention to a bareheaded straggler in the gray dawn hours. On he came, stopping, throwing, hauling his little wagon toward the next door. He was within twenty yards of Gregor now; yet not once had his eyes fallen squarely on Gregor's face.

Then one of his expert casts misfired. The paper he threw unrolled and fell into a flower bed beside the door he had aimed at. The boy dropped his wagon handle, and went to retrieve the paper and put it back where it belonged.

Gregor sighed deeply. At that moment he felt as if he would have given half his fortune to have had the lad smile and nod a good morning to him. But, there! His footfalls were soundless. The youngster was no doubt half asleep. It was natural that he hadn't noticed him. And in a way it was reassuring. It indicated that Gregor was not the monstrosity he'd feared he might be: if that were true, no matter how sleepy and unobservant the boy was he would have seen him right enough!

More people began to emerge from the doors of houses and apartment buildings. A thin trickle of humanity, that was presently to become a swollen stream bound for the day's work. But not one soul stared at Gregor. Not one curious glance was turned his way.

He was very close to Carfax's place now. Less than three blocks intervened. Two of those three blocks lay along a street-car avenue; and here the trickles of early workers were converging into quite a rivulet. Now, at last, some one would have to pay him a little heed.

Almost eagerly, Gregor turned into the avenue, and headed for a group of at least thirty people waiting for a car.

Straight toward them he went. No eye was turned in his direction. It was uncanny. It was ghastly.

Gregor waved his arms. He *must* attract some attention. He felt as if it had grown into a life or death issue now. But still no one looked at him.

He strode to within five feet of the crowd. "Hey!" he shouted, with all his lung-power.

No one looked up from his paper.

A slow chill crept up Gregor's back. Eyes starting from his head, he glared at the incredibly incurious group of people.

Was he mad—or were they all stone-deaf?

"Hey!" he cried again. "Look at me, some one—for the love of God!"

It was more of a scream than a shout. A frightened, almost hysterical shriek. Still no one stared at him.

Staggering a little, Gregor went closer. He'd grab some one by the shoulder—that big man with the cigar in his mouth, for example—and *make* him look up.

He stepped up to the fellow, and clapped his hand down on his shoulder. He was not at all gentle about it. Big as the man was, he should have been fairly thrown off balance by it.

However, he wasn't. For once more Gregor's hand encountered no solidity where his eyes told him solidity was to be expected. Instead, his hand went down through shoulder and torso with almost no resistance.

The man took the cigar out of his mouth, expectorated, and put it back between his lips. He turned another page of his newspaper; went on reading.

"Carfax," whimpered Gregor. "Carfax. . . ."

Alone in a gray world; his body invisible to those whom he could still see as well as ever; his shouts unheard.

"Carfax, you've got to know how to get me out of this. You've got to!"

Straight into the group of people he walked—into it, and through it.

"Sort of chilly this morning, isn't it?" a thin little man remarked to a fat fellow in a derby standing next to him. "Goes right to your bones, somehow."

Tottering, eyes glazed, Gregor went on toward Carfax's house.

If Carfax couldn't see him or hear him, how could he be made to understand that Gregor was there begging that he be transported back to his rightful plane?

But he'd get Carfax's attention somehow! He had to!

The professor's old-fashioned house showed before him down a tree-lined street half a block from the car-line. Gregor turned toward it as a pilgrim in quest of eternal salvation turns toward Mecca.

A man and a woman, quarreling together about some detail or other, stepped out of the nearest gate and came toward him. Instinctively Gregor started to step aside, then threw up his arm to ward them off. Through arm and body they walked, still grumbling at each other, on toward the car-line.

Gregor began to run, finishing the last few yards to Carfax's door at a frantic pace.

He pushed directly through the front door and into the lower hall. There he paused a moment in indecision. He had only visited here twice before; he was uncertain where Carfax's bedroom was. He assumed the professor was sleeping, callous as that seemed. Any man who could experiment on an unconscious and helpless human being with no more compunction than if he had been a guinea-pig, would be conscienceless enough to be able to sleep afterward.

Uncertainly, he went up the staircase in front of him, and walked through the wall into the first room on his right.

"I—I beg your pardon," he mumbled, forgetting he could neither be seen nor heard. "I thought this was the professor's room. . . ."

The girl, whom he recognized as Carfax's daughter, went unconcernedly on with her dressing. She yawned, and gazed through him at a clock on the bureau behind him. Gregor backed blindly out through the wall.

Now he heard a mumble of voices two doors down the hall. And one of the voices belonged to Carfax! Gregor covered the distance in a bound; but outside the door he stopped, trembling in every limb.

He felt as though he could not go into that room and face Carfax if his very life depended on it. Suppose he found no way of communicating with him across the gulf separating the two dimensions? Suppose he found, now that he was at last in the presence of the scientist, that all his wild hopes were groundless? No, not for his life could he compel his shaking legs to carry him forward.

Ah, but *more* than life depended on his confronting Carfax and somehow making him recognize the fact that he was there! With an enormous effort of will, he composed himself.

The voices sounded more loudly through the door. Carfax and—yes, Mark Seely, were in that room. And of the two Carfax sounded the most excited.

He *should* be the most excited, damn him! The thing he had done was worse than murder. But the excitement was bad. Very bad! It sounded as though he had got beyond his depth in that experiment, and was now fearfully trying to justify himself to Mark Seely. As if justification were possible!

Gregor's breath whistled between his teeth. Well, there was one way to find out what the professor's powers were.

He walked through the door.

In the professor's room everything was upset as if a feverish hand had rumpled it. Cigarette stubs littered the smoking-stand. The bed was awry, as though sleep had been wooed but not won. The carpet was a little crumpled under pacing feet.

On the bed sat the professor, eyes bloodshot, holding a glass in one shaking hand. Facing him, in an easy-chair, was Mark Seely, a little less unstrung, but far from being in his normal state.

Reeling a little, Gregor stood near the door, gazing at Professor Carfax. And if ever blasting condemnation and accusation were in a man's eyes, they were in Gregor's. The professor, indeed, seemed to feel that murderous stare, for he shivered a little and gulped some of the contents of the glass.

"I think I'd better go home," Seely said wearily. "It's full morning——"

"No, no!" Carfax begged. "Not just yet. Stay with me just a little longer, will you?"

Seely settled back in his chair.

"God, a thing like that sort of—gets you, doesn't it?" Carfax muttered, his voice so low Gregor could barely hear it. "It shows how human and fallible we are."

Seely nodded, his lips twitching.

"One minute he was perfectly all right, talking to us, talking just as we are now, and then——"

"Try not to think about it," Seely cut in. "Try to forget it."

"If I only could! If only I could forget the sight of him tripping and falling—such a little fall—shouldn't have hurt a child——"

The bare-headed man in the doorway staggered back a pace as though he'd been stabbed. His teeth clenched. He squeezed his fists to his ears to shut out the words. But like the knell of doom they tolled against his quivering brain.

"One minute alive and well——" Carfax said.

Gregor bounded toward him; clutched at his shoulder. "No, no!" he shrieked. "Carfax, stop—for God's sake!"

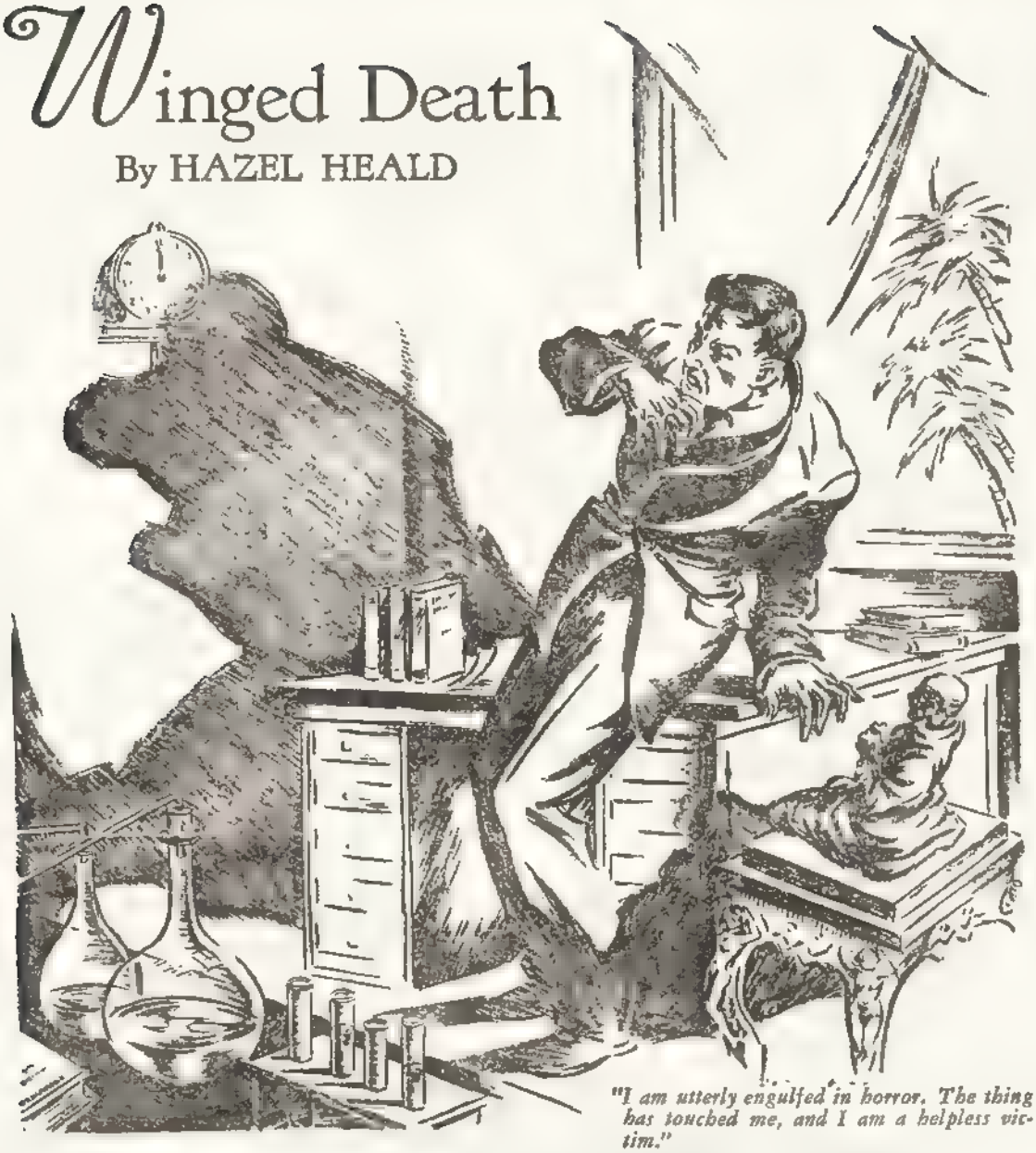
"——and the next minute——"

"No—*no*—NO!"

"——dead," concluded Carfax. "Did you say something, Seely?"

Winged Death

By HAZEL HEALD



"I am utterly engulfed in horror. The thing has touched me, and I am a helpless victim."

An eery story of the frightful doom that pursued a scientist who bred poisonous African insects to kill his friend

THE Orange Hotel stands in High Street near the railway station in Bloemfontein, South Africa. On Sunday, January 24, 1932, four men sat shivering from terror in a room on its third floor. One was George C. Titteridge, proprietor of the hotel; another was police constable Ian De Witt of the Central Station; a third was Johannes Bogaert, the local coroner; the fourth, and apparently the least disorganized of the group, was Doctor Cornelius Van Keulen, the coroner's physician.

On the floor, uncomfortably evident amid the stifling summer heat, was the body of a dead man—but this was not what the four were afraid of. Their glances wandered from the table, on

which lay a curious assortment of things, to the ceiling overhead, across whose smooth whiteness a series of huge, faltering alphabetical characters had somehow been scrawled in ink; and every now and then Doctor Van Keulen would glance half furtively at a worn leather blank-book which he held in his left hand. The horror of the four seemed about equally divided among the blank-book, the scrawled words on the ceiling, and a dead fly of peculiar aspect which floated in a bottle of ammonia on the table. Also on the table were an open inkwell, a pen and writing-pad, a physician's medical case, a bottle of hydrochloric acid, and a tumbler about a quarter full of black oxide of manganese.

The worn leather book was the journal of the dead man on the floor, and had at once made it clear that the name "Frederick N. Mason, Mining Properties, Toronto, Canada," signed in the hotel register, was a false one. There were other things —terrible things—which it likewise made clear; and still other things of far greater terror at which it hinted hideously without making them clear or even fully believable. It was the half-belief of the four men, fostered by lives spent close to the black, settled secrets of brooding Africa, which made them shiver so violently in spite of the searing January heat.

The blank-book was not a large one, and the entries were in a fine handwriting, which, however, grew careless and nervous-looking toward the last. It consisted of a series of jottings at first rather irregularly spaced, but finally becoming daily. To call it a diary would not be quite correct, for it chronicled only one set of its writer's activities. Doctor Van Keulen recognized the name of the dead man the moment he opened the cover, for it was that of an eminent member of his own profession who had been largely connected with African matters. In another moment he was horrified to find this name linked with a dastardly crime, officially unsolved, which had filled the newspapers some four months before. And the farther he read, the deeper grew his horror, awe, and sense of loathing and panic.

Here, in essence, is the text which the doctor read aloud in that sinister and increasingly noisome room while the three men around him breathed hard, fidgeted in their chairs, and darted frightened glances at the ceiling, the table, the thing on the floor, and one another:

JOURNAL OF THOMAS SLAUENWITE, M. D.

Touching punishment of Henry Sargent Moore, Ph. D., of Brooklyn, New York, Professor of Invertebrate Biology in Columbia University, New York, N. Y. Prepared to be read after my death, for the satisfaction of making public the accomplishment of my revenge, which may otherwise never be imputed to me even if it succeeds.

January 5, 1929—I have now fully resolved to kill Doctor Henry Moore, and a recent incident has shown me how I shall do it. From now on, I shall follow a consistent line of action; hence the beginning of this journal.

It is hardly necessary to repeat the circumstances which have driven me to this course, for the informed part of the public is familiar with all the salient facts. I was born in Trenton, New Jersey, on April 12, 1885, the son of Doctor Paul Slauenwite, formerly of Pretoria, Transvaal, South Africa. Studying medicine as part of my family tradition, I was led by my father (who died in 1916, while I was serving in France in a South African regiment) to specialize in African fevers; and after my graduation from Columbia

spent much time in researches which took me from Durban, in Natal, up to the equator itself.

In Mombasa I worked out my new theory of the transmission and development of remittent fever, aided only slightly by the papers of the late government physician, Sir Norman Sloane, which I found in the house I occupied. When I published my results I became at a single stroke a famous authority. I was told of the probability of an almost supreme position in the South African health service, and even a probable knighthood, in the event of my becoming a naturalized citizen, and accordingly I took the necessary steps.

THEN occurred the incident for which I am about to kill Henry Moore. This man, my classmate and friend of years in America and Africa, chose deliberately to undermine my claim to my own theory; alleging that Sir Norman Sloane had anticipated me in every essential detail, and implying that I had probably found more of his papers than I had stated in my account of the matter. To buttress this absurd accusation he produced certain personal letters from Sir Norman which indeed showed that the older man had been over my ground, and that he would have published his results very soon but for his sudden death. This much I could only admit with regret. What I could not excuse was the jealous suspicion that I had stolen the theory from Sir Norman's papers. The British government, sensibly enough, ignored these aspersions, but withheld the half-promised appointment and knighthood on the ground that my theory, while original with me, was not in fact new.

I could soon see that my career in Africa was perceptibly checked; though I had placed all my hopes on such a career, even to the point of resigning American citizenship. A distinct coolness toward me had arisen among the Government set in Mombasa, especially among those who had known Sir Norman. It was then that I resolved to be even with Moore sooner or later, though I did not know how. He had been jealous of my early celebrity, and had taken advantage of his old correspondence with Sir Norman to ruin me. This from the friend whom I had myself led to take an interest in Africa—whom I had coached and inspired till he achieved his present moderate fame as an authority on African entomology. Even now, though, I will not deny that his attainments are profound. I made him, and in return he has ruined me. Now—some day—I shall destroy him.

When I saw myself losing ground in Mombasa, I applied for my present situation in the interior—at M'gonga, only fifty miles from the Uganda line. It is a cotton and ivory trading-post, with only eight white men besides myself. A beastly hole, almost on the equator, and full of every sort of fever known to mankind. Poisonous snakes and insects everywhere, and niggers with diseases nobody ever heard of outside medical college. But my work is not hard, and I have always had plenty of time to plan things to do to Henry Moore. It amuses me to give his *Diptera of Central and Southern Africa* a prominent place on my shelf. I suppose it actually is a standard manual—they use it at Columbia, Harvard, and the U. of Wis.—but my own suggestions are really responsible for half its strong points.

Last week I encountered the thing which decided me how to kill Moore. A party from Uganda brought in a black with a queer illness which I can't yet diagnose. He was lethargic, with a very

low temperature, and shuffled in a peculiar way. Most of the others were afraid of him and said he was under some kind of witch-doctor spell; but Gobo, the interpreter, said he had been bitten by an insect. What it was, I can't imagine—for there is only a slight puncture on the arm. It is bright red, though, with a purple ring around it. Spectral-looking—I don't wonder the boys lay it to black magic. They seem to have seen cases like it before, and say there's really nothing to do about it.

Old N'Kuru, one of the Galla boys at the post, says it must be the bite of a devil-fly, which makes its victim waste away gradually and die, and then takes hold of his soul and personality if it is still alive itself—flying around with all his likes, dislikes, and consciousness. A queer legend—and I don't know of any local insect deadly enough to account for it. I gave this sick black—his name is Mevana—a good shot of quinine and took a sample of his blood for testing, but haven't made much progress. There is certainly a strange germ present, but I can't even remotely identify it. The nearest thing to it is the bacillus one finds in oxen, horses, and dogs that the tsetse-fly has bitten; but tsetse-flies don't infect human beings, and this is too far north for them anyway.

However—the important thing is that I've decided how to kill Moore. If this interior region has insects as poisonous as the natives say, I'll see that he gets a shipment of them from a source he won't suspect, and with plenty of assurances that they are harmless. Trust him to throw overboard all caution when it comes to studying an unknown species—and then we'll see how nature takes its course! It ought not to be hard to find an insect that scares the blacks so much. First to see how poor Mevana turns out—and then to find my envoy of death.

JAN. 7—Mevana is no better, though I have injected all the antitoxins I know of. He has fits of trembling, in which he rants affrightedly about the way his soul will pass when he dies into the insect that bit him, but between them he remains in a kind of half-stupor. Heart action still strong, so I may pull him through. I shall try to, for he can probably guide me better than anyone else to the region where he was bitten.

Meanwhile I'll write to Doctor Lincoln, my predecessor here, for Allen, the head factor, says he had a profound knowledge of the local sicknesses. He ought to know about the death-fly if any white man does. He's at Nairobi now, and a black runner ought to get me a reply in a week—using the railway for half the trip.

Jan. 10—Patient unchanged, but I have found what I want! It was in an old volume of the local health records, which I've been going over diligently while waiting to hear from Lincoln. Thirty years ago there was an epidemic that killed off thousands of natives in Uganda, and it was definitely traced to a rare fly called *glossina palpalis*—a sort of cousin of the *glossina marsitans,* or tsetse. It lives in the bushes on the shores of lakes and rivers, and feeds on the blood of crocodiles, antelopes, and large mammals. When these food animals have the germ of trypanosomiasis, or sleeping-sickness, it picks it up and develops acute infectivity after an incubation period of thirty-one days. Then for seventy-five days it is sure death to anyone or anything it bites.

Without doubt, this must be the "devil-fly" the niggers talk about. Now I know what I'm heading for. Hope Me-

vana pulls through. Ought to hear from Lincoln in four or five days—he has a great reputation for success in things like this. My worst problem will be to get the flies to Moore without his recognizing them. With his cursed plodding scholarship it would be just like him to know all about them since they're actually on record.

Jan. 15—Just heard from Lincoln, who confirms all that the records say about *glossina palpalis*. He has a remedy for sleeping-sickness which has succeeded in a great number of cases when not given too late. Intermuscular injections of tryparsamide. Since Mevana was bitten about two months ago, I don't know how it will work—but Lincoln says that cases have been known to drag on eighteen months, so possibly I'm not too late. Lincoln sent over some of his stuff, so I've just given Mevana a stiff shot. In a stupor now. They've brought his principal wife from his village, but he doesn't even recognize her. If he recovers, he can certainly show me where the flies are. He's a great crocodile hunter, according to report, and knows all Uganda like a book. I'll give him another shot tomorrow.

Jan. 16—Mevana seems a little brighter today, but his heart action is slowing up a bit. I'll keep up the injections, but not overdo them.

Jan. 17—Recovery really pronounced today. Mevana opened his eyes and showed signs of actual consciousness, though dazed, after the injection. Hope Moore doesn't know about tryparsamide. There's a good chance he won't, since he never leaned much toward medicine. Mevana's tongue seemed paralyzed, but I fancy that will pass off if I can only wake him up. Wouldn't mind a good sleep myself, but not of this kind!

Jan. 25—Mevana nearly cured! In another week I can let him take me into the jungle. He was frightened when he first came to—about having the fly take his personality after he died—but brightened up finely when I told him he was going to get well. His wife, Ugowe, takes good care of him now, and I can rest a bit. Then for the envoys of death!

Feb. 3—Mevana is well now, and I have talked with him about a hunt for flies. He dreads to go near the place where they got him, but I am playing on his gratitude. Besides, he has an idea that I can ward off disease as well as cure it. His pluck would shame a white man—there's no doubt that he'll go. I can get off by telling the head factor the trip is in the interest of local health work.

MARCH 12—In Uganda at last! Have five boys besides Mevana, but they are all Gallas. The local blacks couldn't be hired to come near the region after the talk of what had happened to Mevana. This jungle is a pestilential place—steaming with miasmal vapors. All the lakes look stagnant. In one spot we came upon a trace of Cyclopean ruins which made even the Gallas run past in a wide circle. They say these megaliths are older than man, and that they used to be a haunt or outpost of "The Fishers from Outside"—whatever that means—and of the evil gods Tsadogwa and Clulu. To this day they are said to have a malign influence, and to be connected somehow with the devil-flies.

March 15—Struck Lake Mlolo this morning—where Mevana was bitten. A hellish, green-scummed affair, full of crocodiles. Mevana has fixed up a fly-trap of fine wire netting baited with crocodile meat. It has a small entrance, and once the quarry get in, they don't know enough to get out. As stupid as they are deadly, and ravenous for fresh meat or a bowl of

blood. Hope we can get a good supply. I've decided that I must experiment with them—finding a way to change their appearance so that Moore won't recognize them. Possibly I can cross them with some other species, producing a strange hybrid whose infection-carrying capacity will be undiminished. We'll see. I must wait, but am in no hurry now. When I get ready I'll have Mevana get me some infected meat to feed my envoys of death—and then for the post-office. Ought to be no trouble getting infection, for this country is a veritable pest-hole.

March 16—Good luck. Two cages full. Five vigorous specimens with wings glistening like diamonds. Mevana is emptying them into a large can with a tightly meshed top, and I think we caught them in the nick of time. We can get them to M'gonga without trouble. Taking plenty of crocodile meat for their food. Undoubtedly all or most of it is infected.

April 20—Back at M'gonga and busy in the laboratory. Have sent to Doctor Joost in Pretoria for some tsetse flies for hybridization experiments. Such a crossing, if it will work at all, ought to produce something pretty hard to recognize yet at the same time just as deadly as the *palpalis*. If this doesn't work, I shall try certain other diptera from the interior, and I have sent to Doctor Vandervelde at Nyangwe for some of the Congo types. I shan't have to send Mevana for more tainted meat after all; for I find I can keep cultures of the germ *trypanosoma gambiense,* taken from the meat we got last month, almost indefinitely in tubes. When the time comes, I'll taint some fresh meat and feed my winged envoys a good dose—then *bon voyage* to them!

June 18—My tsetse flies from Joost came today. Cages for breeding were all ready long ago, and I am now making selections. Intend to use ultra-violet rays to speed up the life-cycle. Fortunately I have the needed apparatus in my regular equipment. Naturally I tell no one what I'm doing. The ignorance of the few men here makes it easy for me to conceal my aims and pretend to be merely studying existing species for medical reasons.

June 29—The crossing is fertile! Good deposits of eggs last Wednesday, and now I have some excellent larvæ. If the mature insects look as strange as these do, I need do nothing more. Am preparing separate numbered cages for the different specimens.

July 7—New hybrids are out! Disguise is excellent as to shape, but sheen of wings still suggests *palpalis*. Thorax has faint suggestions of the stripes of the tsetse. Slight variation in individuals. Am feeding them all on tainted crocodile meat, and after infectivity develops will try them on some of the blacks—apparently, of course, by accident. There are so many mildly venomous flies around here that it can easily be done without exciting suspicion. I shall loose an insect in my tightly screened dining-room when Batta, my house-boy, brings in breakfast—keeping well on guard myself. When it has done its work I'll capture or swat it—an easy thing because of its stupidity—or asphyxiate it by filling the room with chlorine gas. If it doesn't work the first time, I'll try again until it does. Of course, I'll have the tryparsamide handy in case I get bitten myself—but I shall be careful to avoid biting, for no antidote is really certain.

Aug. 10—Infectivity mature, and managed to get Batta stung in fine shape. Caught the fly on him, returning it to its cage. Eased up the pain with iodine, and the poor devil is quite grateful for the service. Shall try a variant specimen on Gamba, the factor's messenger, tomorrow. That will be all the tests I shall dare

to make here, but if I need more I shall take some specimens to Ukala and get additional data.

Aug. 11—Failed to get Gamba, but recaptured the fly alive. Batta still seems as well as usual, and has no pain in the back where he was stung. Shall wait before trying to get Gamba again.

Aug. 14—Shipment of insects from Vandervelde at last. Fully seven distinct species, some more or less poisonous. Am keeping them well fed in case the tsetse crossing doesn't work. Some of these fellows look very unlike the *palpalis*, but the trouble is that they may not make a fertile cross with it.

Aug. 17—Got Gamba this afternoon, but had to kill the fly on him. It nipped him in the left shoulder. I dressed the bite, and Gamba is as grateful as Batta was. No change in Batta.

Aug. 20—Gamba unchanged so far—Batta too. Am experimenting with a new form of disguise to supplement the hybridization—some sort of dye to change the telltale glitter of the *palpalis'* wings. A bluish tint would be best—something I could spray on a whole batch of insects. Shall begin by investigating things like Prussian and Turnbull's blue—iron and cyanogen salts.

Aug. 25—Batta complained of a pain in his back today—things may be developing.

Sept. 3—Have made fair progress in my experiments. Batta shows signs of lethargy, and says his back aches all the time. Gamba beginning to feel uneasy in his bitten shoulder.

Sept. 24—Batta worse and worse, and beginning to get frightened about his bite. Thinks it must be a devil-fly, and entreated me to kill it—for he saw me cage it—until I pretended to him that it had died long ago. Said he didn't want his soul to pass into it upon his death. I give him shots of plain water with a hypodermic to keep his morale up. Evidently the fly retains all the properties of the *palpalis*. Gamba down, too, and repeating all of Batta's symptoms. I may decide to give him a chance with tryparsamide, for the effect of the fly is proved well enough. I shall let Batta go on, however, for I want a rough idea of how long it takes to finish a case.

Dye experiments coming along finely. An isomeric form of ferrous ferrocyanide, with some admixture of potassium salts, can be dissolved in alcohol and sprayed on the insects with splendid effect. It stains the wings blue without affecting the dark thorax much, and doesn't wear off when I sprinkle the specimens with water. With this disguise, I think I can use the present tsetse hybrids and avoid bothering with any more experiments. Sharp as he is, Moore couldn't recognize a blue-winged fly with a half-tsetse thorax. Of course, I keep all this dye business strictly under cover. Nothing must ever connect me with the blue flies later on.

Oct. 9—Batta is lethargic and has taken to his bed. Have been giving Gamba tryparsamide for two weeks, and fancy he'll recover.

Oct. 25—Batta very low, but Gamba nearly well.

Nov. 18—Batta died yesterday, and a curious thing happened which gave me a real shiver in view of the native legends and Batta's own fears. When I returned to the laboratory after the death I heard the most singular buzzing and thrashing in cage 12, which contained the fly that bit Batta. The creature seemed frantic, but stopped still when I appeared—lighting on the wire netting and looking at me in the oddest way. It reached its legs through the wires as if it were bewildered. When I came back from dining with

Allen, the thing was dead. Evidently it had gone wild and beaten its life out on the sides of the cage.

It certainly is peculiar that this should happen just as Batta died. If any black had seen it, he'd have laid it at once to the absorption of the poor devil's soul. I shall start my blue-stained hybrids on their way before long now. The hybrid's rate of killing seems a little ahead of the pure *palpalis*' rate, if anything. Batta died three months and eight days after infection—but of course there is always a wide margin of uncertainty. I almost wish I had let Gamba's case run on.

Dec. 5—Busy planning how to get my envoys to Moore. I must have them appear to come from some disinterested entomologist who has read his *Diptera of Central and Southern Africa* and believes he would like to study this "new and unidentifiable species." There must also be ample assurances that the blue-winged fly is harmless, as proved by the natives' long experience. Moore will be off his guard, and one of the flies will surely get him sooner or later—though one can't tell just when.

I'll have to rely on the letters of New York friends—they still speak of Moore from time to time—to keep me informed of early results, though I dare say the papers will announce his death. Above all, I must show no interest in his case. I shall mail the flies while on a trip, but must not be recognized when I do it. The best plan will be to take a long vacation in the interior, grow a beard, mail the package at Ukala while passing as a visiting entomologist, and return here after shaving off the beard.

APRIL 12, 1930—Back in M'gonga after my long trip. Everything has come off finely—with clockwork precision. Have sent the flies to Moore without leaving a trace. Got a Christmas vacation Dec. 15th, and set out at once with the proper stuff. Made a very good mailing container with room to include some germ-tainted crocodile meat as food for the envoys. By the end of February I had beard enough to shape into a close Vandyke.

Showed up at Ukala March 9th and typed a letter to Moore on the trading-post machine. Signed it "Nevil Wayland-Hall"—supposed to be an entomologist from London. Think I took just the right tone—interest of a brother-scientist, and all that. Was artistically casual in emphasizing the "complete harmlessness" of the specimens. Nobody suspected anything. Shaved the beard as soon as I hit the bush, so that there wouldn't be any uneven tanning by the time I got back here. Dispensed with native bearers except for one small stretch of swamp—I can do wonders with one knapsack, and my sense of direction is good. Lucky I'm used to such travelling. Explained my protracted absence by pleading a touch of fever and some mistakes in direction when going through the bush.

But now comes the hardest part psychologically—waiting for news of Moore without showing the strain. Of course, he may possibly escape a bite until the venom is played out—but with his recklessness the chances are one hundred to one against him. I have no regrets; after what he did to me, he deserves this and more.

June 30, 1930—Hurrah! The first step worked! Just heard casually from Dyson of Columbia that Moore had received some new blue-winged flies from Africa, and that he is badly puzzled over them! No word of any bite—but if I know Moore's slipshod ways as I think I do, there'll be one before long!

August 27, 1930—Letter from Morton

in Cambridge. He says Moore writes of feeling very run-down, and tells of an insect bite on the back of his neck—from a curious new specimen that he received about the middle of June. Have I succeeded? Apparently Moore doesn't connect the bite with his weakness. If this is the real stuff, then Moore was bitten well within the insect's period of infectivity.

Sept. 12, 1930—Victory! Another line from Dyson says that Moore is really in an alarming shape. He now traces his illness to the bite, which he received around noon on June 19, and is quite bewildered about the identity of the insect. Is trying to get in touch with the "Nevil Wayland-Hall" who sent him the shipment. Of the hundred-odd that I sent, about twenty-five seem to have reached him alive. Some escaped at the time of the bite, but several larvæ have appeared from eggs laid since the time of mailing. He is, Dyson says, carefully incubating these larvæ. When they mature I suppose he'll identify the tsetse-palpalis hybridization—but that won't do him much good now. He'll wonder, though, why the blue wings aren't transmitted by heredity!

Nov. 8, 1930—Letters from half a dozen friends tell of Moore's serious illness. Dyson's came today. He says Moore is utterly at sea about the hybrids that came from the larvæ and is beginning to think that the parents got their blue wings in some artificial way. Has to stay in bed most of the time now. No mention of using tryparsamide.

Feb. 13, 1931—Not so good! Moore is sinking, and seems to know no remedy, but I think he suspects one. Had a very chilly letter from Morton last month, which told nothing of Moore; and now Dyson writes—also rather constrainedly—that Moore is forming theories about the whole matter. He's been making a search for "Wayland-Hall" by telegraph—at London, Ukala, Nairobi, Mombasa, and other places—and of course finds nothing. I judge that he's told Dyson whom he suspects, but that Dyson doesn't believe it yet. Fear Morton does believe it.

I see that I'd better lay plans for getting out of here and effacing my identity for good. What an end to a career that started out so well! More of Moore's work—but this time he's paying for it in advance! Believe I'll go back to South Africa—and meanwhile will quietly deposit funds there to the credit of my new self—"Frederick Nasmyth Mason of Toronto, Canada, broker in mining properties." Will establish a new signature for identification. If I never have to take the step, I can easily re-transfer the funds to my present self.

Aug. 15, 1931—Half a year gone, and still suspense. Dyson and Morton—as well as several other friends—seem to have stopped writing me. Doctor James of San Francisco hears from Moore's friends now and then, and says Moore is in an almost continuous coma. He hasn't been able to walk since May. As long as he could talk he complained of being cold. Now he can't talk, though it is thought he still has glimmers of consciousness. His breathing is short and quick, and can be heard some distance away. No question but that *trypanosoma gambiense* is feeding on him—but he holds out better than the niggers around here. Three months and eight days finished Batta, and here Moore is alive over a year after his biting. Heard rumors last month of an intensive search around Ukala for "Wayland-Hall." Don't think I need to worry yet, though, for there's absolutely nothing in existence to link me with this business.

Oct. 7, 1931—It's over at last! News in the *Mombasa Gazette*. Moore died September 20 after a series of trembling fits and with a temperature vastly below normal. So much for that! I said I'd get him, and I did! The paper had a three-column report of his long illness and death, and of the futile search for "Wayland-Hall." Obviously, Moore was a bigger character in Africa than I had realized. The insect that bit him has now been fully identified from the surviving specimens and developed larvæ, and the wing-staining is also detected. It is universally realized that the flies were prepared and shipped with intent to kill. Moore, it appears, communicated certain suspicions to Dyson, but the latter—and the police—are maintaining secrecy because of absence of proof. All of Moore's enemies are being looked up, and the Associated Press hints that "an investigation, possibly involving an eminent physician now abroad, will follow."

One thing at the very end of the report—undoubtedly, the cheap romancing of a yellow journalist—gives me a curious shudder in view of the legends of the blacks and the way the fly happened to go wild when Batta died. It seems that an odd incident occurred on the night of Moore's death; Dyson having been aroused by the buzzing of a blue-winged fly—which immediately flew out the window—just before the nurse telephoned the death news from Moore's home, miles away in Brooklyn.

But what concerns me most is the African end of the matter. People at Ukala remember the bearded stranger who typed the letter and sent the package, and the constabulary are combing the country for any blacks who may have carried him. I didn't use many, but if officers question the Ubandes who took me through N'Kini jungle belt I'll have more to explain than I like. It looks as if the time had come for me to vanish; so tomorrow I believe I'll resign and prepare to start for parts unknown.

Nov. 9, 1931—Hard work getting my resignation acted on, but release came today. I didn't want to aggravate suspicion by decamping outright. Last week I heard from James about Moore's death—but nothing more than is in the papers. Those around him in New York seem rather reticent about details, though they all talk about a searching investigation. No word from any of my friends in the east. Moore must have spread some dangerous suspicions around before he lost consciousness—but there isn't an iota of proof he could have adduced.

Still, I am taking no chances. On Thursday I shall start for Mombasa, and when there will take a steamer down the coast to Durban. After that I shall drop from sight—but soon afterward the mining properties' broker Frederick Nasmyth Mason, from Toronto, will turn up in Johannesburg.

Let this be the end of my journal. If in the end I am not suspected, it will serve its original purpose after my death and reveal what would otherwise not be known. If, on the other hand, these suspicions do materialize and persist, it will confirm and clarify the vague charges, and fill in many important and puzzling gaps. Of course, if danger comes my way I shall have to destroy it.

Well, Moore is dead—as he amply deserves to be. Now Doctor Thomas Slauenwite is dead, too. And when the body formerly belonging to Thomas Slauenwite is dead, the public may have this record.

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JAN. 15, 1932—A new year—and a reluctant reopening of this journal.

This time I am writing solely to relieve my mind, for it would be absurd to fancy that the case is not definitely closed. I am settled in the Vaal Hotel, Johannesburg, under my new name, and no one has so far challenged my identity. Have had some inconclusive business talks to keep up my part as a mine broker, and believe I may actually work myself into that business. Later I shall go to Toronto and plant a few evidences for my fictitious past.

But what is bothering me is an insect that invaded my room around noon today. Of course I have had all sorts of nightmares about blue flies of late, but those were only to be expected in view of my prevailing nervous strain. This thing, however, was a waking actuality, and I am utterly at a loss to account for it. It buzzed around my bookshelf for fully a quarter of an hour, and eluded every attempt to catch or kill it. The queerest thing was its color and aspect—for it had blue wings and was in every way a duplicate of my hybrid envoys of death. How it could possibly be one of these, in fact, I certainly don't know. I disposed of all the hybrids—stained and unstained—that I didn't send to Moore, and can't recall any instance of escape.

Can this be wholly an hallucination? Or could any of the specimens that escaped in Brooklyn when Moore was bitten have found their way back to Africa? There was that absurd story of the blue fly that waked Dyson when Moore died—but after all, the survival and return of some of the things is not impossible. It is perfectly plausible that the blue should stick to their wings, too, for the pigment I devised was almost as good as tattooing for permanence. By elimination, that would seem to be the only rational explanation for this thing; though it is very curious that the fellow has come as far south as this. Possibly it's some hereditary homing instinct inherent in the tsetse strain. After all, that side of him belongs to South Africa.

I must be on my guard against a bite. Of course the original venom—if this is actually one of the flies that escaped from Moore—was worn out ages ago; but the fellow must have fed as he flew back from America, and he may well have come through Central Africa and picked up a fresh infectivity. Indeed, that's more probable than not; for the *palpalis* half of his heredity would naturally take him back to Uganda, and all the *trypanosomiasis* germs. I still have some of the tryparsamide left—I couldn't bear to destroy my medicine case, incriminating though it may be—but since reading up on the subject I am not so sure about the drug's action as I was. It gives one a fighting chance—certainly it saved Gamba—but there's always a large probability of failure.

It's devilish queer that this fly should have happened to come into my room—of all places in the wide expanse of Africa! Seems to strain coincidence to the breaking-point. I suppose that if it comes again, I shall certainly kill it. I'm surprized that it escaped me today, for ordinarily these fellows are extremely stupid and easy to catch. Can it be a pure illusion after all? Certainly, the heat is getting me of late as it never did before—even up around Uganda.

Jan. 16—Am I going insane? The fly came again this noon, and acted so anomalously that I can't make head or tail of it. Only delusion on my part could account for what that buzzing pest seemed to do. It appeared from nowhere, and went straight to my bookshelf—circling again and again in front of a copy of Moore's *Diptera of Central and Southern Africa.* Now and then it would light on

top or back of the volume, and occasionally it would dart forward toward me and retreat before I could strike at it with a folded paper. Such cunning is unheard of among the notoriously stupid African diptera. For nearly half an hour I tried to get the cursed thing, but at last it darted out the window through a hole in the screen that I hadn't noticed. At times I fancied it deliberately mocked me by coming within reach of my weapon and then skilfully sidestepping as I struck out. I must keep a tight hold on my consciousness.

Jan. 17—Either I am mad or the world is in the grip of some sudden suspension of the laws of probability as we know them. That damnable fly came in from somewhere just before noon and commenced buzzing around the copy of Moore's *Diptera* on my shelf. Again I tried to catch it, and again yesterday's experience was repeated. Finally the pest made for the open inkwell on my table and dipped itself in—just the legs and thorax, keeping its wings clear. Then it sailed up to the ceiling and lit—beginning to crawl around in a curved path and leaving a trail of ink. After a time it hopped a bit and made a single ink spot unconnected with the trail—then it dropped squarely in front of my face, and buzzed out of sight before I could get it.

Something about this whole business struck me as monstrously sinister and abnormal—more so than I could explain to myself. When I looked at the ink-trail on the ceiling from different angles, it seemed more and more familiar to me, and it dawned on me suddenly that it formed an absolutely perfect question-mark. What device could be more malignly appropriate? It is a wonder that I did not faint. So far the hotel attendants had not noticed it. Have not seen the fly this afternoon and evening, but am keeping my inkwell securely closed. I think my extermination of Moore must be preying on me, and giving me morbid hallucinations. Perhaps there is no fly at all.

JAN. 18—Into what strange hell of living nightmare am I plunged? What occurred today is something which could not normally happen—*and yet an hotel attendant has seen the marks on the ceiling and concedes their reality.* About 11 o'clock this morning, as I was writing on a manuscript, something darted down to the inkwell for a second and flashed aloft again before I could see what it was. Looking up, I saw that hellish fly on the ceiling as it had been before—crawling along and tracing another trail of curves and turns. There was nothing I could do, but I folded a newspaper in readiness to get the creature if it should fly near enough. When it had made several turns on the ceiling it flew into a dark corner and disappeared, and as I looked upward at the doubly defaced plastering I saw that the new ink-trail was that of a huge and unmistakable figure 5!

For a time I was almost unconscious from a wave of nameless menace for which I could not fully account. Then I summoned up my resolution and took an active step. Going out to a chemist's shop I purchased some gum and other things necessary for preparing a sticky trap—also a duplicate inkwell. Returning to my room, I filled the new inkwell with the sticky mixture and set it where the old one had been, leaving it open. Then I tried to concentrate my mind on some reading. About 3 o'clock I heard the accursed insect again, and saw it circling around the new inkwell. It descended to the sticky surface but did not touch it, and afterward sailed straight toward me—retreating before I could hit

it. Then it went to the bookshelf and circled around Moore's treatise. There is something profound and diabolic about the way the intruder hovers near that book.

The worst part was the last. Leaving Moore's book, the insect flew over to the open window and began beating itself rhythmically against the wire screen. There would be a series of beats and then a series of equal length and another pause, and so on. Something about this performance held me motionless for a couple of moments, but after that I went over to the window and tried to kill the noxious thing. As usual, no use. It merely flew across the room to a lamp and began beating the same tattoo on the stiff cardboard shade. I felt a vague desperation, and proceeded to shut all the doors as well as the window whose screen had the imperceptible hole. It seemed very necessary to kill this persistent being, whose hounding was rapidly unseating my mind. Then, unconsciously counting, I began to notice that each of its series of beatings contained just *five* strokes.

Five—the same number that the thing had traced in ink on the ceiling in the morning! Could there be any conceivable connection? The notion was maniacal, for that would argue a human intellect and a knowledge of written figures in the hybrid fly. A human intellect—did not that take one back to the most primitive legends of the Uganda blacks? And yet there was that infernal cleverness in eluding me as contrasted with the normal stupidity of the breed. As I laid aside my folded paper and sat down in growing horror, the insect buzzed aloft and disappeared through a hole in the ceiling where the radiator pipe went to the room above.

The departure did not soothe me, for my mind had started on a train of wild and terrible reflections. If this fly had a human intelligence, where did that intelligence come from? Was there any truth in the native notion that these creatures acquire the personality of their victims after the latters' death? If so, whose personality did this fly bear? I had reasoned out that it must be one of those which escaped from Moore at the time he was bitten. *Was this the envoy of death which had bitten Moore? If so, what did it want with me?* What did it want with me anyway? In a cold perspiration I remembered the actions of the fly that had bitten Batta when Batta died. Had its own personality been displaced by that of its dead victim? Then there was that sensational news account of the fly that waked Dyson when Moore died. As for that fly that was hounding me—could it be that a vindictive human personality drove it on? How it hovered around Moore's book!—I refused to think any farther than that. All at once I began to feel sure that the creature was indeed infected, and in the most virulent way. With a malign deliberation so evident in every act, it must surely have charged itself on purpose with the deadliest bacilli in all Africa. My mind, thoroughly shaken, was now taking the thing's human qualities for granted.

I now telephoned the clerk and asked for a man to stop up the radiator pipe-hole and other possible chinks in my room. I spoke of being tormented by flies, and he seemed to be quite sympathetic. When the man came, I showed him the ink-marks on the ceiling, which he recognized without difficulty. So they are real! The resemblance to a question-mark and a figure five puzzled and fascinated him. In the end he stopped up all the holes he could find, and mended the window-screen, so that I can now keep both windows open. He evidently thought

me a bit eccentric, especially since no insects were in sight while he was here. But I am past minding that. So far the fly has not appeared this evening. God knows what it is, what it wants, or what will become of me!

JAN. 19—I am utterly engulfed in horror. *The thing has touched me.* Something monstrous and demoniac is at work around me, and I am a helpless victim. In the morning, when I returned from breakfast, that winged fiend from hell brushed into the room over my head, and began beating itself against the window-screen as it did yesterday. This time, though, each series of beats continued only *four* strokes. I rushed to the window and tried to catch it, but it escaped as usual and flew over to Moore's treatise, where it buzzed around mockingly. Its vocal equipment is limited, but I noticed that its spells of buzzing came in groups of four.

By this time I was certainly mad, for I called out to it, *"Moore, Moore, for God's sake, what do you want?"* When I did so, the creature suddenly ceased its circling, flew toward me, and made a low, graceful dip in the air, somehow suggestive of a bow. Then it flew back to the book. At least, I seemed to see it do all this—though I am trusting my senses no longer.

And then the worst thing happened. I had left my door open, hoping the monster would leave if I could not catch it; but about 11:30 I shut the door, concluding it had gone. Then I settled down to read. Just at noon I felt a tickling on the back of my neck, but when I put my hand up nothing was there. In a moment I felt the tickling again—and befor I could move, that nameless spawn of hell sailed into view from behind, did another of those mocking, graceful dips in the air, and flew out through the keyhole—which I had never dreamed was large enough to allow its passage.

That the thing had touched me, I could not doubt. It had touched me without injuring me—and then I remembered in a sudden cold fright that Moore had been bitten *on the back of the neck at noon.* No invasion since then—but I have stuffed all the keyholes with paper and shall have a folded paper ready for use whenever I open the door to leave or enter.

Jan. 20—I can not yet believe fully in the supernatural, yet I fear none the less that I am lost. The business is too much for me. Just before noon today that devil appeared *outside* the window and repeated its beating operations; but this time in series of *three.* When I went to the window it flew off out of sight. I still have resolution enough to take one more defensive step. Removing both window-screens, I coated them with my sticky preparation—the one I used in the ink-well—outside and inside, and set them back in place. If that creature attempts another tattoo, it will be its last!

Rest of the day in peace. Can I weather this experience without becoming a maniac?

Jan. 21—On board train for Bloemfontein.

I am routed. The thing is winning. It has a diabolic intelligence against which all my devices are powerless. It appeared outside the window this morning, *but did not touch the sticky screen.* Instead, it sheered off without lighting and began buzzing around in circles—*two at a time,* followed by a pause in the air. After several of these performances it flew off out of sight over the roofs of the city. My nerves are just about at the breaking-point, for these *suggestions of numbers* are capable of a hideous interpretation.

Monday the thing dwelt on the figure *five;* Tuesday it was *four;* Wednesday it was *three;* and now today it is *two. Five, four, three, two*—what can this be save some monstrous and unthinkable *counting-off of days?* For what purpose, only the evil powers of the universe can know. I spent all the afternoon packing and arranging about my trunks, and now I have taken the night express for Bloemfontein. Flight may be useless, but what else can one do?

Jan. 22—Settled at the Orange Hotel, Bloemfontein—a comfortable and excellent place—but the horror followed me. I had shut all the doors and windows, stopped all the keyholes, looked for any possible chinks, and pulled down all the shades—but just before noon I heard a dull tap on one of the window-screens. I waited—and after a long pause another tap came. A second pause, and still another single tap. Raising the shade, I saw that accursed fly, as I had expected. It described one large, slow circle in the air, and then flew out of sight. I was left as weak as a rag, and had to rest on the couch. *One!* This was clearly the burden of the monster's present message. *One* tap, *one* circle. Did this mean *one* more day for me before some unthinkable doom? Ought I to flee again, or entrench myself here by sealing up the room?

After an hour's rest I felt able to act, and ordered a large reserve supply of canned and package food — also linen and towels—sent in. Tomorrow I shall not under any circumstances open any crevice of door or window. When the food and linen came the black looked at me queerly, but I no longer care how eccentric—or insane—I may appear. I am hounded by powers worse than the ridicule of mankind. Having received my supplies, I went over every square millimeter of the walls, and stopped up every microscopic opening I could find. At last I feel able to get real sleep.

[*Handwriting here becomes irregular, nervous, and very difficult to decipher.*]

JAN. 23—It is just before noon, and I feel that something very terrible is about to happen. Didn't sleep as late as I expected, even though I got almost no sleep on the train the night before. Up early, and have had trouble getting concentrated on anything—reading or writing. That slow, deliberate counting-off of days is too much for me. I don't know which has gone wild—nature or my head. Until about eleven I did very little except walk up and down the room.

Then I heard a rustle among the food packages brought in yesterday, and that demoniac fly crawled out before my eyes. I grabbed something flat and made passes at the thing despite my panic fear, but with no more effect than usual. As I advanced, that blue-winged horror retreated as usual to the table where I had piled my books, and lit for a second on Moore's *Diptera of Central and Southern Africa.* Then as I followed, it flew over to the mantel clock and lit on the dial near the figure 12. Before I could think up another move it had begun to crawl around the dial very slowly and deliberately—in the direction of the hands. It passed under the minute hand, curved down and up, passed under the hour hand, and finally came to a stop exactly at the figure 12. As it hovered there it fluttered its wings with a buzzing noise.

Is this a portent of some sort? I am getting as superstitious as the blacks. The hour is now a little after eleven. Is twelve the end? I have just one last resort, brought to my mind through utter desperation. Wish I had thought of it before. Recalling that my medicine case

contains both of the substances necessary to generate chlorine gas, I have resolved to fill the room with that lethal vapor—asphyxiating the fly while protecting myself with an ammonia-sealed handkerchief tied over my face. Fortunately I have a good supply of ammonia. This crude mask will probably neutralize the acrid chlorine fumes till the insect is dead—or at least helpless enough to crush. But I must be quick. How can I be sure that the thing will not suddenly dart for me before my preparations are complete? I ought not to be stopping to write in this journal.

Later—Both chemicals—hydrochloric acid and manganese dioxide—on the table all ready to mix. I've tied the handkerchief over my nose and mouth, and have a bottle of ammonia ready to keep it soaked until the chlorine is gone. Have battened down both windows. But I don't like the actions of that hybrid demon. It stays on the clock, but is very slowly crawling around backward from the 12 mark to meet the gradually advancing minute-hand.

Is this to be my last entry in this journal? It would be useless to try to deny what I suspect. Too often a grain of incredible truth lurks behind the wildest and most fantastic of legends. Is the personality of Henry Moore trying to get at me through this blue-winged devil? Is this the fly that bit him, and that in consequence absorbed his consciousness when he died? If so, and if it bites me, will my own personality displace Moore's and enter that buzzing body when I die of the bite later on? Perhaps, though, I need not die even if it gets me. There is always a chance with tryparsamide. And I regret nothing. Moore had to die, be the outcome what it will.

Slightly later.

The fly has paused on the clock-dial near the 45-minute mark. It is now 11:30. I am saturating the handkerchief over my face with ammonia, and keeping the bottle handy for further applications. This will be the final entry before I mix the acid and manganese and liberate the chlorine. I ought not to be losing time, but it steadies me to get things down on paper. But for this record, I'd have lost all my reason long ago. The fly seems to be getting restless, and the minute-hand is approaching it. Now for the chlorine. . . .

[*End of the journal*]

ON SUNDAY, Jan. 24, 1932, after repeated knocking had failed to gain any response from the eccentric man in Room 303 of the Orange Hotel, a black attendant entered with a pass key and at once fled shrieking downstairs to tell the clerk what he had found. The clerk, after notifying the police, summoned the manager; and the latter accompanied Constable De Witt, Coroner Bogaert, and Doctor Van Keulen to the fatal room.

The occupant lay dead on the floor—his face upward, and bound with a handkerchief which smelled strongly of ammonia. Under this covering the features showed an expression of stark, utter fear which transmitted itself to the observers. On the back of the neck Doctor Van Keulen found a virulent insect bite—dark red, with a purple ring around it—which suggested a tsetse fly or something less innocuous. An examination indicated that death must be due to heart-failure induced by sheer fright rather than to the bite—though a subsequent autopsy indicated that the germ of *trypanosomiasis* had been introduced into the system.

On the table were several objects—a worn leather blank-book containing the journal just transcribed, a pen, writing-

pad, and open inkwell, a doctor's medicine case with the initials "T. S." marked in gold, bottles of ammonia and hydrochloric acid, and a tumbler about a quarter full of black manganese dioxide. The ammonia bottle demanded a second look because something besides the fluid seemed to be in it. Looking closer, Coroner Bogaert saw that the alien occupant was a fly.

It seemed to be some sort of hybrid with vague tsetse affiliations, but its wings —showing faintly blue despite the action of the strong ammonia—were a complete puzzle. Something about it waked a faint memory of newspaper reading in Doctor Van Keulen—a memory which the journal was soon to confirm. Its lower parts seemed to have been stained with ink, so thoroughly that even the ammonia had not bleached them. Possibly it had fallen at one time into the inkwell, though the wings were untouched. But how had it managed to fall into the narrow-necked ammonia bottle? It was as if the creature had deliberately crawled in and committed suicide!

But the strangest thing of all was what Constable De Witt noticed on the smooth white ceiling overhead as his eyes roved about curiously. At his cry the other three followed his gaze—even Doctor Van Keulen, who had for some time been thumbing through the worn leather book with an expression of mixed horror, fascination, and incredulity. The thing on the ceiling was a series of shaky, straggling ink-tracks, such as might have been made by the crawling of some ink-drenched insect. At once every one thought of the stains on the fly so oddly found in the ammonia-bottle.

But these were no ordinary ink-tracks. Even a first glance revealed something hauntingly familiar about them, and closer inspection brought gasps of startled wonder from all four observers. Coroner Bogaert instinctively looked around the room to see if there were any conceivable instrument or arrangement of piled-up furniture which could make it possible for those straggling marks to have been drawn by human agency. Finding nothing of the sort, he resumed his curious and almost awestruck upward glance.

For beyond a doubt these inky smudges formed definite letters of the alphabet—letters coherently arranged in English words. The doctor was the first to make them out clearly, and the others listened breathlessly as he recited the insane-sounding message so incredibly scrawled in a place no human hand could reach:

"SEE MY JOURNAL—*IT'* GOT ME FIRST —I DIED—THEN I SAW I WAS IN *IT*— THE BLACKS ARE RIGHT—STRANGE POWERS IN NATURE—NOW I WILL DROWN WHAT IS LEFT——"

Presently, amid the puzzled hush that followed, Doctor Van Keulen commenced reading aloud from the worn leather journal.

The Charnel God

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A colorful tale about a ghoulish priesthood, and the great black shadow that welled up into hideous being in the temple of Mordiggian

"MORDIGGIAN is the god of Zul-Bha-Sair," said the innkeeper with unctuous solemnity. "He has been the god from years that are lost to man's memory in shadow deeper than the subterranes of his black temple. There is no other god in Zul-Bha-Sair. And all who die within the walls of the city are sacred to Mordiggian. Even the kings and the optimates, at death, are delivered into the hands of his muffled priests. It is the law and the custom. A little while, and the priests will come for your bride."

"But Elaith is not dead," protested the youth Phariom for the third or fourth time, in piteous desperation. "Her malady is one that assumes the lying likeness of death. Twice before has she lain insensible, with a pallor upon her cheeks, and a stillness in her very blood, that could hardly be distinguished from those of the tomb; and twice she has awakened after an interim of days."

The innkeeper peered with an air of ponderous unbelief at the girl who lay white and motionless as a mown lily on the bed in the poorly furnished attic chamber.

"In that case you should not have brought her into Zul-Bha-Sair," he averred in a tone of owlish irony. "The physician has pronounced her dead; and her death has been reported to the priests. She must go to the temple of Mordiggian."

"But we are outlanders, guests of a night. We have come from the land of Xylac, far in the north; and this morning we should have gone on through Tasuun, toward Pharaad, the capital of Yoros, which lies near to the southern sea. Surely your god could have no claim upon Elaith, even if she were truly dead."

"All who die in Zul-Bha-Sair are the property of Mordiggian," insisted the taverner sententiously. "Outlanders are not exempt. The dark maw of his temple yawns eternally, and no man, no child, no woman, throughout the years, has evaded its yawning. All mortal flesh must become, in due time, the provender of the god."

Phariom shuddered at the oily and portentous declaration.

"Dimly have I heard of Mordiggian, as a legend that travellers tell in Xylac," he admitted. "But I had forgotten the name of his city; and Elaith and I came ignorantly into Zul-Bha-Sair. . . . Even had I known, I should have doubted the terrible custom of which you inform me. . . . What manner of deity is this, who imitates the hyena and the vulture? Surely he is no god, but a ghoul."

"Take heed, lest you utter blasphemy," admonished the innkeeper. "Mordiggian is old and omnipotent as death. He was worshipped in former continents, before the lifting of Zothique from out the sea. Through him, we are saved from corruption and the worm. Even as the people of other places devote their dead to the consuming flame, so we of Zul-Bha-Sair deliver ours to the god. Awful is the fane, a place of terror and obscure shadow untrod by the sun, into which the

"Two of the shrouded figures were sharing the burden of a human body."

dead are borne by his priests and are laid on a vast table of stone to await his coming from the nether vault in which he dwells. No living men, other than the priests, have ever beheld him; and the faces of the priests are hidden behind masks of silver, and even their hands are shrouded, that men may not gaze on them that have seen Mordiggian."

"But there is a king in Zul-Bha-Sair, is there not? I shall appeal to him against this heinous and horrible injustice. Surely he will heed me."

"Phenquor is the king; but he could not help you even if he wished. Your appeal will not even be heard. Mordiggian is above all kings, and his law is sacred. Hark!—for already the priests come."

Phariom, sick at heart with the charnel terror and cruelty of the doom that impended for his girlish wife in this unknown city of nightmare, heard an evil, stealthy creaking on the stairs that led to the attic of the inn. The sound drew nearer with unhuman rapidity, and four strange figures came into the room, heavily garbed in funereal purple, and wearing huge masks of silver graven in the likeness of skulls. It was impossible to surmise their actual appearance, for, even as the taverner had hinted, their very hands were concealed by fingerless gloves; and the purple gowns came down in loose folds that trailed about their feet like unwinding cerecloths. There was a horror about them, of which the macabre masks were only a lesser element; a hor-

ror that lay partly in their unnatural, crouching attitudes, and the beast-like agility with which they moved, unhampered by their cumbrous habiliments.

Among them, they carried a curious bier, made from interwoven strips of leather, and with monstrous bones that served for frame and handles. The leather was greasy and blackened as if from long years of mortuary use. Without speaking to Phariom or the innkeeper, and with no delay or formality of any sort, they advanced toward the bed on which Elaith was lying.

Undeterred by their more than formidable aspect, and wholly distraught with grief and anger, Phariom drew from his girdle a short knife, the only weapon he possessed. Disregarding the minatory cry of the taverner, he rushed wildly upon the muffled figures. He was quick and muscular, and, moreover, was clad in light, close-fitting raiment, such as would seemingly have given him a brief advantage.

The priests had turned their backs upon him; but, as if they had foreseen his every action, two of them wheeled about with the swiftness of tigers, dropping the handles of bone that they carried. One of them struck the knife from Phariom's hand with a movement that the eye could barely follow in its snaky darting. Then both assailed him, beating him back with terrible flailing blows of their shrouded arms, and hurling him half across the room into an empty corner. Stunned by his fall, he lay senseless for a term of minutes.

Recovering dazedly, with eyes that blurred as he opened them, he beheld the face of the stout taverner stooping above him like a tallow-colored moon. The thought of Elaith, more sharp than the thrust of a dagger, brought him back to agonizing consciousness. Fearfully he scanned the shadowy room, and saw that the cerements priests were gone, that the bed was vacant. He heard the orotund and sepulchral croaking of the taverner.

"The priests of Mordiggian are merciful, they make allowance for the frenzy and distraction of the newly bereaved. It is well for you that they are compassionate, and considerate of mortal weakness."

PHARIOM sprang erect, as if his bruised and aching body were scorched by a sudden fire. Pausing only to retrieve his knife, which still lay in the middle of the room, he started toward the door. He was stopped by the hand of the hosteler, clutching greasily at his shoulder.

"Beware, lest you exceed the bounds of the mercy of Mordiggian. It is an ill thing to follow his priests—and a worse thing to intrude upon the deathly and sacred gloom of his temple."

Phariom scarcely heard the admonition. He wrenched himself hastily away from the odious fingers, and turned to go; but again the hand clutched him.

"At least, pay me the money that you owe for food and lodging, ere you depart," demanded the innkeeper. "Also, there is the matter of the physician's fee, which I can settle for you, if you will entrust me with the proper sum. Pay now —for there is no surety that you will return."

Phariom drew out the purse that contained his entire worldly wealth, and filled the greedily cupped palm before him with coins that he did not pause to count. With no parting word or backward glance, he descended the moldy and musty stairs of the worm-eaten hostelry, as if spurred by an incubus, and went out into the gloomy, serpentine streets of Zul-Bha-Sair.

2

PERHAPS the city differed little from others, except in being older and darker; but to Phariom, in his extremity of anguish, the ways that he followed were like subterrene corridors that led only to some profound and monstrous charnel. The sun had risen above the overjutting houses, but it seemed to him that there was no light, other than a lost and doleful glimmering such as might descend into mortuary depths. The people, it may have been, were much like other people, but he saw them under a malefic aspect, as if they were ghouls and demons that went to and fro on the ghastly errands of a necropolis.

Bitterly, in his distraction, he recalled the previous evening, when he had entered Zul-Bha-Sair at twilight with Elaith, the girl riding on the one dromedary that had survived their passage of the northern desert, and he walking beside her, weary but content. With the rosy purple of afterglow upon its walls and cupolas, with the deepening golden eyes of its lit windows, the place had seemed a fair and nameless city of dreams, and they had planned to rest there for a day or two before resuming the long, arduous journey to Pharaad, in Yoros.

This journey had been undertaken only through necessity. Phariom, an impoverished youth of noble blood, had been exiled because of the political and religious tenets of his family, which were not in accord with those of the reigning emperor, Caleppos. Taking his newly wedded wife, Phariom had set out for Yoros, where certain allied branches of the house to which he belonged had already established themselves, and would give him a fraternal welcome.

They had travelled with a large caravan of merchants, going directly southward to Tasuun. Beyond the borders of Xylac, amid the red sands of the Celotian waste, the caravan had been attacked by robbers, who had slain many of its members and dispersed the rest. Phariom and his bride, escaping with their dromedaries, had found themselves lost and alone in the desert, and, failing to regain the road toward Tasuun, had taken inadvertently another track, leading to Zul-Bha-Sair, a walled metropolis on the southwestern verge of the waste, which their itinerary had not included.

Entering Zul-Bha-Sair, the couple had repaired for reasons of economy to a tavern in the humbler quarter. There, during the night, Elaith had been overcome by the third seizure of the cataleptic malady to which she was liable. The earlier seizures, occurring before her marriage to Phariom, had been recognized in their true character by the physicians of Xylac, and had been palliated by skilful treatment. It was hoped that the malady would not recur. The third attack, no doubt, had been induced by the fatigues and hardships of the journey. Phariom had felt sure that Elaith would recover; but a doctor of Zul-Bha-Sair, hastily summoned by the innkeeper, had insisted that she was actually dead; and, in obedience to the strange law of the city, had reported her death without delay to the priests of Mordiggian. The frantic protests of the husband had been utterly ignored.

There was, it seemed, a diabolic fatality about the whole train of circumstances through which Elaith, still living, though with that outward aspect of the tomb which her illness involved, had fallen into the grasp of the devotees of the charnel god. Phariom pondered this fatality almost to madness, as he strode with furious, aimless haste along the eternally winding and crowded streets.

To the cheerless information received from the taverner, he added, as he went

on, more and more of the tardily remembered legends which he had heard in Xylac. Ill and dubious indeed was the renown of Zul-Bha-Sair, and he marvelled that he should have forgotten it, and cursed himself with black curses for the temporary but fatal forgetfulness. Better would it have been if he and Elaith had perished in the desert, rather than enter the wide gates that stood always open, gaping for their prey, as was the custom of Zul-Bha-Sair.

The city was a mart of trade, where outland travellers came, but did not care to linger, because of the repulsive cult of Mordiggian, the invisible eater of the dead, who was believed to share his provender with the shrouded priests. It was said that the bodies lay for days in the dark temple and were not devoured till corruption had begun. And people whispered of fouler things than necrophagism, of blasphemous rites that were solemnized in the ghoul-ridden vaults, and nameless uses to which the dead were put before Mordiggian claimed them. In all outlying places, the fate of those who died in Zul-Bha-Sair was a dreadful byword and a malediction. But to the people of that city, reared in the faith of the ghoulish god, it was merely the usual and expected mode of mortuary disposal. Tombs, graves, catacombs, funeral pyres, and other such nuisances, were rendered needless by this highly utilitarian deity.

Phariom was surprized to see the people of the city going about the common businesses of life. Porters were passing with bales of household goods upon their shoulders. Merchants were squatting in their shops like other merchants. Buyers and sellers chaffered loudly in the public bazars. Women laughed and chattered in the doorways. Only by their voluminous robes of red, black and violet, and their strange, uncouth accents, was he able to distinguish the men of Zul-Bha-Sair from those who were outlanders like himself. The murk of nightmare began to lift from his impressions; and gradually, as he went on, the spectacle of everyday humanity all about him helped to calm a little his wild distraction and desperation. Nothing could dissipate the horror of his loss, and the abominable fate that threatened Elaith. But now, with a cool logic born of the cruel exigence, he began to consider the apparently hopeless problem of rescuing her from the ghoul-god's temple.

HE COMPOSED his features, and constrained his febrile pacing to an idle saunter, so that none might guess the preoccupations that racked him inwardly. Pretending to be interested in the wares of a seller of men's apparel, he drew the dealer into converse regarding Zul-Bha-Sair and its customs, and made such inquiries as a traveller from far lands might make. The dealer was talkative, and Phariom soon learned from him the location of the temple of Mordiggian, which stood at the city's core. He also learned that the temple was open at all hours, and that people were free to come and go within its precincts. There were, however, no rituals of worship, other than certain private rites that were celebrated by the priesthood. Few cared to enter the fane, because of a superstition that any living person who intruded upon its gloom would return to it shortly as the provender of the god.

Mordiggian, it seemed, was a benign deity in the eyes of the inhabitants of Zul-Bha-Sair. Curiously enough, no definite personal attributes were ascribed to him. He was, so to speak, an impersonal force akin to the elements—a consuming and cleansing power, like fire. His hierophants were equally mysterious; they

lived in the temple and emerged from it only in the execution of their funereal duties. No one knew the manner of their recruiting, but many believed that they were both male and female, thus renewing their numbers from generation to generation with no ulterior commerce. Others thought that they were not human beings at all, but an order of subterranean earth-entities, who lived for ever, and who fed upon corpses like the god himself. Through this latter belief, of late years, a minor heresy had risen, some holding that Mordiggian was a mere hieratic figment, and the priests were the sole devourers of the dead. The dealer, quoting this heresy, made haste to disavow it with pious reprobation.

Phariom chatted for awhile on other topics, and then continued his progress through the city, going as forthrightly toward the temple as the obliquely running thoroughfares would permit. He had formed no conscious plan, but desired to reconnoiter the vicinage. In that which the garment-dealer had told him, the one reassuring detail was the openness of the fane and its accessibility to all who dared enter. The rarity of visitors, however, would make Phariom conspicuous, and he wished above all to avoid attention. On the other hand, any effort to remove bodies from the temple was seemingly unheard of—a thing audacious beyond the dreams of the people of Zul-Bha-Sair. Through the very boldness of his design, he might avoid suspicion, and succeed in rescuing Elaith.

The streets that he followed began to tend downward, and were narrower, dimmer and more tortuous than any he had yet traversed. He thought for awhile that he had lost his way, and he was about to ask the passers to redirect him, when four of the priests of Mordiggian, bearing one of the curious litter-like biers of bone and leather, emerged from an ancient alley just before him.

The bier was occupied by the body of a girl, and for one moment of convulsive shock and agitation that left him trembling, Phariom thought that the girl was Elaith. Looking again, he saw his mistake. The gown that the girl wore, though simple, was made of some rare exotic stuff. Her features, though pale as those of Elaith, were crowned with curls like the petals of heavy black poppies. Her beauty, warm and voluptuous even in death, differed from the blond pureness of Elaith as tropic lilies differ from narcissi.

Quietly, and maintaining a discreet interval, Phariom followed the sullenly shrouded figures and their lovely burden. He saw that people made way for the passage of the bier with awed, unquestioning alacrity; and the loud voices of hucksters and chafferers were hushed as the priests went by. Overhearing a murmured conversation between two of the townsfolk, he learned that the dead girl was Arctela, daughter of Quaos, a high noble and magistrate of Zul-Bha-Sair. She had died very quickly and mysteriously, from a cause unknown to the physicians, which had not marred or wasted her beauty in the least. There were those who held that an indetectable poison, rather than disease, had been the agency of death; and others deemed her the victim of malefic sorcery.

The priests went on, and Phariom kept them in sight as well as he could in the blind tangle of streets. The way steepened, without affording any clear prospect of the levels below, and the houses seemed to crowd more closely, as if huddling back from a precipice. Finally the youth emerged behind his macabre guides in a sort of circular hollow at the city's heart, where the temple of Mordiggian

loomed alone and separate amid pavements of sad onyx, and funerary cedars whose green had blackened as if with the undeparting charnel shadows bequeathed by dead ages.

The edifice was built of a strange stone, hued as with the blackish purple of carnal decay: a stone that refused the ardent luster of noon, and the prodigality of dawn or sunset glory. It was low and windowless, having the form of a monstrous mausoleum. Its portals yawned sepulchrally in the gloom of the cedars.

Phariom watched the priests as they vanished within the portals, carrying the girl Arctela like phantoms who bear a phantom burden. The broad area of pavement between the recoiling houses and the temple was now deserted, but he did not venture to cross it in the blare of betraying daylight. Circling the area, he saw that there were several other entrances to the great fane, all open and unguarded. There was no sign of activity about the place; but he shuddered at the thought of that which was hidden within its walls, even as the feasting of worms is hidden in the marble tomb.

Like a vomiting of charnels, the abominations of which he had heard rose up before him on the sunlight; and again he drew close to madness, knowing that Elaith must lie among the dead, in the temple, with the foul umbrage of such things upon her; and that he, consumed with unremitting frenzy, must wait for the favorable shrouding of darkness before he could execute his nebulous, doubtful plan of rescue. In the meanwhile, she might awake, and perish from the mortal horror of her surroundings . . . or worse even than this might befall, if the whispered tales were true. . . .

3

ABNON-THA, sorcerer and necromancer, was felicitating himself on the bargain he had made with the priests of Mordiggian. He felt, perhaps justly, that no one less clever than he could have conceived and executed the various procedures that had made possible this bargain, through which Arctela, daughter of the proud Quaos, would become his unquestioning slave. No other lover, he told himself, could have been resourceful enough to obtain a desired woman in this fashion. Arctela, betrothed to Alos, a young noble of the city, was seemingly beyond the aspiration of a sorcerer. Abnon-Tha, however, was no common hedge-wizard, but an adept of long standing in the most awful and profound arcana of the black arts. He knew the spells that kill more quickly and surely than knife or poison, at a distance; and he knew also the darker spells by which the dead can be reanimated, even after years or ages of decay. He had slain Arctela in a manner that none could detect, with a rare and subtle invultuation that had left no mark; and her body lay now among the dead, in Mordiggian's temple. Tonight, with the tacit connivance of the terrible, shrouded priests, he would bring her back to life.

Abnon-Tha was not native to Zul-Bha-Sair, but had come many years before from the infamous, half-mythic isle of Sotar, lying somewhere to the east of the huge continent of Zothique. Like a sleek young vulture, he had established himself in the very shadow of the charnel fane, and had prospered, taking to himself pupils and assistants.

His dealings with the priests were long and extensive, and the bargain he had just made was far from being the first of its kind. They had allowed him the

temporary use of bodies claimed by Mordiggian, stipulating only that these bodies should not be removed from the temple during the course of any of his experiments in necromancy. Since the privilege was slightly irregular from their viewpoint, he had found it necesary to bribe them—not, however, with gold, but with the promise of a liberal purveyance of matters more sinister and corruptible than gold. The arrangement had been satisfactory enough to all concerned: cadavers had poured into the temple with more than their usual abundance ever since the coming of the sorcerer; the god had not lacked for provender; and Abnon-Tha had never lacked for subjects on which to employ his more baleful spells.

On the whole, Abnon-Tha was not ill-pleased with himself. He reflected, moreover, that, aside from his mastery of magic and his sleightful ingenuity, he was about to manifest a well-nigh unexampled courage. He had planned a robbery that would amount to dire sacrilege: the removal of the reanimated body of Arctela from the temple. Such robberies (either of animate or exanimate corpses) and the penalty attached to them, were a matter of legend only; for none had occurred in recent ages. Thrice terrible, according to common belief, was the doom of those who had tried and failed. The necromancer was not blind to the risks of his enterprise; nor, on the other hand, was he deterred or intimidated by them.

His two assistants, Narghai and Vemba-Tsith, apprised of his intention, had made with all due privity the necessary preparations for their flight from Zul-Bha-Sair. The strong passion that the sorcerer had conceived for Arctela was not his only motive, perhaps, in removing from that city. He was desirous of change, for he had grown a little weary of the odd laws that really served to restrict his necromantic practises, while facilitating them in a sense. He planned to travel southward, and establish himself in one of the cities of Tasuun, an empire famous for the number and antiquity of its mummies.

It was now sunset-time. Five dromedaries, bred for racing, waited in the inner courtyard of Abnon-Tha's house, a high and moldering mansion that seemed to lean forward upon the open, circular area belonging to the temple. One of the dromedaries would carry a bale containing the sorcerer's most valuable books, manuscripts, and other impedimenta of magic. Its fellows would bear Abnon-Tha, the two assistants—and Arctela.

Narghai and Vemba-Tsith appeared before their master to tell him that all was made ready. Both were much younger than Abnon-Tha; but, like himself, they were outlanders in Zul-Bha-Sair. They came of the swart and narrow-eyed people of Naat, an isle that was little less infamous than Sotar.

"It is well," said the necromancer, as they stood before him with lowered eyes, after making their announcement. "We have only to await the favorable hour. Midway between sunset and moonrise, when the priests are at their supper in the nether adytum, we will enter the temple and perform that which must be done for the raising of Arctela. *They* feed well tonight, for I know that many of the dead grow ripe on the great table in the upper sanctuary; and it may be that Mordiggian feeds also. None will come to watch us at our doings."

"But, master," said Narghai, shivering a little beneath his robe of nacarat red, "is it wise, after all, to do this thing? Must you take the girl from the temple? Always, ere this, you have contented yourself with the brief loan that the priests allow, and have rendered back the dead

in the required state of exanimation. Truly, is it well to violate the law of the god? Men say that the wrath of Mordiggian, though seldom loosed, is more dreadful than the wrath of all other deities. For this reason, none has dared to defraud him in latter years, or attempt the removal of any of the corpses from his fane. Long ago, it is told, a high noble of the city bore hence the cadaver of a woman he had loved, and fled with it into the desert; but the priests pursued him, running more swiftly than jackals . . . and the fate that overtook him is a thing whereof the legends whisper but dimly."

"I fear neither Mordiggian nor his creatures," said Abnon-Tha, with a solemn vainglory in his voice. "My dromedaries can outrun the priests—even granting that the priests are not men at all, but ghouls, as some say. And there is small likelihood that they will follow us: after their feasting tonight, they will sleep like gorged vultures. The morrow will find us far on the road to Tasuun, ere they awake."

"The master is right," interpolated Vemba-Tsith. "We have nothing to fear."

"But they say that Mordiggian does not sleep," insisted Narghai, "and that he watches all things eternally from his black vault beneath the temple."

"So I have heard," said Abnon-Tha, with a dry and learned air. "But I consider that such beliefs are mere superstition. There is nothing to confirm them in the real nature of corpse-eating entities. So far, I have never beheld Mordiggian, either sleeping or awake; but in all likelihood he is merely a common ghoul. I know these demons and their habits. They differ from hyenas only through their monstrous shape and size, and their immortality."

"Still, I must deem it an ill thing to cheat Mordiggian," muttered Narghai beneath his breath.

The words were caught by the quick ears of Abnon-Tha. "Nay, there is no question of cheating. Well have I served Mordiggian and his priesthood, and amply have I larded their black table. Also, I shall keep, in a sense, the bargain I have made concerning Arctela: the providing of a new cadaver in return for my necromantic privilege. Tomorrow, the youth Alos, the betrothed of Arctela, will lie in her place among the dead. Go now, and leave me, for I must devise the inward invultuation that will rot the heart of Alos, like a worm that awakens at the core of fruit."

4

TO PHARIOM, fevered and distraught, it seemed that the cloudless day went by with the sluggishness of a corpse-clogged river. Unable to calm his agitation, he wandered aimlessly through the thronged bazars, till the western towers grew dark on a heaven of saffron flame, and the twilight rose like a gray and curdling sea among the houses. Then he returned to the inn where Elaith had been stricken, and claimed the dromedary which he had left in the tavern stables. Riding the animal through dim thoroughfares, lit only by the covert gleam of lamps or tapers from half-closed windows, he found his way once more to the city's center.

The dusk had thickened into darkness when he came to the open area surrounding Mordiggian's temple. The windows of mansions fronting the area were shut and lightless as dead eyes, and the fane itself, a colossal bulk of gloom, was rayless as any mausoleum beneath the gathering stars. No one, it seemed, was abroad, and though the quietude was favorable to his project, Phariom shiv-

ered with a chill of deathly menace and desolation. The hoofs of his camel rang on the pavement with a startling and preternatural clangor, and he thought that the ears of hidden ghouls, listening alertly behind the silence, must surely hear them.

However, there was no stirring of life in that sepulchral gloom. Reaching the shelter of one of the thick groups of ancient cedars, he dismounted and tied the dromedary to a low-growing branch. Keeping among the trees, like a shadow among shadows, he approached the temple with infinite wariness, and circled it slowly, finding that its four doorways, which corresponded to the four quarters of the Earth, were all wide open, deserted, and equally dark. Returning at length to the eastern side, on which he had tethered his camel, he emboldened himself to enter the blackly gaping portals.

Crossing the threshold, he was engulfed instantly by a dead and clammy darkness, touched with the faint fetor of corruption, and a smell as of charred bone and flesh. He thought that he was in a huge corridor, and feeling his way forward along the right-hand wall, he soon came to a sudden turn, and saw a bluish glimmering far ahead, as if in some central adytum where the hall ended. Massy columns were silhouetted against the glimmering; and across it, as he drew nearer, several dark and muffled figures passed, presenting the profiles of enormous skulls. Two of them were sharing the burden of a human body which they carried in their arms. To Phariom, pausing in the shadowy hall, it appeared that the vague taint of putrescence upon the air grew stronger for a few instants after the figures had come and gone.

They were not succeeded by any others, and the fane resumed its mausolean stillness. But the youth waited for many minutes, doubtful and trepidant, before venturing to go on. An oppression of mortuary mystery thickened the air, and stifled him like the noisome effluvia of catacombs. His ears became intolerably acute, and he heard a dim humming, a sound of deep and viscid voices indistinguishably blent, that appeared to issue from crypts beneath the temple.

Stealing at length to the hall's end, he peered beyond into what was obviously the main sanctuary: a low and many-pillared room, whose vastness was but half-revealed by the bluish fires that glowed and flickered in numerous urn-like vessels borne aloft on slender stelæ.

Phariom hesitated upon that awful threshold, for the mingled odors of burnt and decaying flesh were heavier on the air, as if he had drawn nearer to their sources; and the thick humming seemed to ascend from a dark stairway in the floor, beside the left-hand wall. But the room, to all appearance, was empty of life, and nothing stirred except the wavering lights and shadows. The watcher discerned the outlines of a vast table in the center, carved from the same black stone as the building itself. Upon the table, half lit by the flaming urns, or shrouded by the umbrage of the heavy columns, a number of people lay side by side; and Phariom knew that he had found the black altar of Mordiggian, whereon were disposed the bodies claimed by the god.

A wild and stifling fear contended with a wilder hope in his bosom. Trembling, he went toward the table; and a cold clamminess, wrought by the presence of the dead, assailed him. The table was nearly thirty feet in length, and it rose waist-high on a dozen mighty legs. Beginning at the nearer end, he passed along the row of corpses, peering fearfully into each upturned face. Both sexes, and many ages and differing ranks were rep-

resented. Nobles and rich merchants were crowded by beggars in filthy rags. Some were newly dead, and others, it seemed, had lain there for days, and were beginning to show the marks of corruption. There were many gaps in the ordered row, suggesting that certain of the corpses had been removed. Phariom went on in the dim light, searching for the loved features of Elaith. At last, when he was nearing the further end, and had begun to fear that she was not among them, he found her.

With the cryptic pallor and stillness of her strange malady upon her, she lay unchanged on the chill stone. A great thankfulness was born in the heart of Phariom, for he felt sure that she was not dead—and that she had not awakened at any time to the horrors of the temple. If he could bear her away from the hateful purlieus of Zul-Bha-Sair without detection, she would recover from her death-simulating sickness.

Cursorily, he noted that another woman was lying beside Elaith, and recognized her as the beautiful Arctela, whose bearers he had followed almost to the portals of the fane. He gave her no second glance, but stooped to lift Elaith in his arms.

At that moment, he heard a murmur of low voices in the direction of the door by which he had entered the sanctuary. Thinking that some of the priests had returned, he dropped swiftly on hands and knees and crawled beneath the ponderous table, which afforded the only accessible hiding-place. Retreating into shadow beyond the glimmering shed from the lofty urns, he waited and looked out between the pillar-thick legs.

THE voices grew louder, and he saw the curiously sandalled feet and shortish robes of three persons who approached the table of the dead and paused in the very spot where he himself had stood a few instants before. Who they were, he could not surmise; but their garments of light and swarthy red were not the shroudings of Mordiggian's priests. He was uncertain whether or not they had seen him; and crouching in the low space beneath the table, he plucked his dagger from its sheath.

Now he was able to distinguish three voices, one solemn and unctuously imperative, one somewhat guttural and growling, and the other shrill and nasal. The accents were alien, differing from those of the men of Zul-Bha-Sair, and the words were often strange to Phariom. Also, much of the converse was inaudible.

". . . here . . . at the end," said the solemn voice. "Be swift. . . . We have no time to loiter."

"Yes, Master," came the growling voice. "But who is this other? . . . Truly, she is very fair."

A discussion seemed to take place, in discreetly lowered tones. Apparently the owner of the guttural voice was urging something that the other two opposed. The listener could distinguish only a word or two here and there; but he gathered that the name of the first person was Vemba-Tsith, and that the one who spoke in a nasal shrilling was called Narghai. At last, above the others, the grave accents of the man addressed only as the Master were clearly audible:

"I do not altogether approve. . . . It will delay our departure . . . and the two must ride on one dromedary. But take her, Vemba-Tsith, if you can perform the necessary spells unaided. I have no time for a double incantation. . . . It will be a good test of your proficiency."

There was a mumbling as of thanks or acknowledgment from Vemba-Tsith. Then the voice of the Master: "Be quiet now,

and make haste." To Phariom, wondering vaguely and uneasily as to the import of this colloquy, it seemed that two of the three men pressed closer to the table, as if stooping above the dead. He heard a rustling of cloth upon stone, and an instant later, he saw that all three were departing among the columns and stelæ, in a direction opposite to that from which they had entered the sanctuary. Two of them carried burdens that glimmered palely and indistinctly in the shadows.

A black horror clutched at the heart of Phariom, for all too clearly he surmised the nature of those burdens—and the possible identity of one of them. Quickly he crawled forth from his hiding-place and saw that Elaith was gone from the black table, together with the girl Arctela. He saw the vanishing of shadowy figures in the gloom that zoned the chamber's western wall. Whether the abductors were ghouls, or worse than ghouls, he could not know, but he followed swiftly, forgetful of all caution in his concern for Elaith.

Reaching the wall, he found the mouth of a corridor, and plunged into it headlong. Somewhere in the gloom ahead, he saw a ruddy glimmering of light. Then he heard a sullen, metallic grating; and the glimmer narrowed to a slit-like gleam, as if the door of the chamber from which it issued were being closed.

Following the blind wall, he came to that slit of crimson light. A door of darkly tarnished bronze had been left ajar, and Phariom peered in on a weird, unholy scene, illumined by the blood-like flames that flared and soared unsteadily from high urns upborne on sable pedestals.

The room was full of a sensuous luxury that accorded strangely with the dull, funereal stone of that temple of death. There were couches and carpets of superbly figured stuffs, vermillion, gold, azure, silver; and jewelled censers of unknown metals stood in the corners. A low table at one side was littered with curious bottles, and occult appliances such as might be used in medicine or sorcery.

Elaith was lying on one of the couches, and near her, on a second couch, the body of the girl Arctela had been disposed. The abductors, whose faces Phariom now beheld for the first time, were busying themselves with singular preparations that mystified him prodigiously. His impulse to invade the room was repressed by a sort of wonder that held him enthralled and motionless.

One of the three, a tall, middle-aged man whom he identified as the Master, had assembled certain peculiar vessels, including a small brazier and a censer, and had set them on the floor beside Arctela. The second, a younger man with lecherously slitted eyes, had placed similar impedimenta before Elaith. The third, who was also young and evil of aspect, merely stood and looked on with an apprehensive, uneasy air.

Phariom divined that the men were sorcerers when, with a deftness born of long practise, they lit the censers and braziers, and began simultaneously the intonation of rhythmically measured words in a strange tongue, accompanied by the sprinkling, at regular intervals, of black oils that fell with a great hissing on the coals in the braziers and sent up enormous clouds of pearly smoke. Dark threads of vapor serpentined from the censers, interweaving themselves like veins through the dim, misshapen figures as of ghostly giants that were formed by the lighter fumes. A reek of intolerably acrid balsams filled the chamber, assailing and troubling the senses of Phariom, till the scene wavered before him and took on a

dream-like vastness, a narcotic distortion.

The voices of the necromancers mounted and fell as if in some unholy pæan. Imperious, exigent, they seemed to implore the consummation of forbidden blasphemy. Like thronging phantoms, writhing and swirling with malignant life, the vapors rose about the couches on which lay the dead girl and the girl who bore the outward likeness of death.

Then, as the fumes were riven apart in their baleful seething, Phariom saw that the pale figure of Elaith had stirred like a sleeper who awakens, that she had opened her eyes and was lifting a feeble hand from the gorgeous couch. The younger necromancer ceased his chanting on a sharply broken cadence; but the solemn tones of the other still went on, and still there was a spell on the limbs and senses of Phariom, making it impossible for him to stir.

Slowly the vapors thinned like a rout of dissolving phantoms. The watcher saw that the dead girl, Arctela, was rising to her feet like a somnambulist. The chanting of Abnon-Tha, standing before her, came sonorously to an end. In the awful silence that followed, Phariom heard a weak cry from Elaith, and then the jubilant, growling voice of Vemba-Tsith, who was stooping above her:

"Behold, O Abnon-Tha! My spells are swifter than yours, for she that I have chosen awakened before Arctela!"

PHARIOM was released from his thralldom, as if through the lifting of an evil enchantment. He flung back the ponderous door of darkened bronze, that ground with protesting clangors on its hinges. His dagger drawn, he rushed into the room.

Elaith, her eyes wide with piteous bewilderment, turned toward him and made an ineffectual effort to arise from the couch. Arctela, mute and submissive before Abnon-Tha, appeared to heed nothing but the will of the necromancer. She was like a fair and soulless automaton. The sorcerers, turning as Phariom entered, sprang back with instant agility before his onset, and drew the short, cruelly crooked swords which they all carried. Narghai struck the knife from Phariom's fingers with a darting blow that shattered its thin blade at the hilt, and Vemba-Tsith, his weapon swinging back in a vicious arc, would have killed the youth promptly if Abnon-Tha had not intervened and bade him stay.

Phariom, standing furious but irresolute before the lifted swords, was aware of the darkly searching eyes of Abnon-Tha, like those of some nyctalopic bird of prey.

"I would know the meaning of this intrusion," said the necromancer. "Truly, you are bold to enter the temple of Mordiggian."

"I came to find the girl who lies yonder," declared Phariom. "She is Elaith, my wife, who was claimed unjustly by the god. But tell me, why have you brought her to this room from the table of Mordiggian, and what manner of men are you, that raise up the dead as you have raised this other woman?"

"I am Abnon-Tha, the necromancer, and these others are my pupils, Narghai and Vemba-Tsith. Give thanks to Vemba-Tsith, for verily he has brought back your wife from the purlieus of the dead with a skill excelling that of his master. She awoke ere the incantation was finished!"

Phariom glared with implacable suspicion at Abnon-Tha. "Elaith was not dead, but only as one in trance," he averred. "It was not your pupil's sorcery that awakened her. And verily, whether Elaith be dead or living is not a matter

that should concern any but myself. Permit us to depart, for I wish to remove with her from Zul-Bha-Sair, in which we are only passing travellers."

So speaking, he turned his back on the necromancers, and went over to Elaith, who regarded him with dazed eyes but uttered his name feebly as he clasped her in his arms.

"Now this is a remarkable coincidence," purred Abnon-Tha. "I and my pupils are also planning to depart from Zul-Bha-Sair, and we start this very night. Perhaps you will honor us with your company."

"I thank you," said Phariom, curtly. "But I am not sure that our roads lie together. Elaith and I would go toward Tasuun."

"Now, by the black altar of Mordiggian, that is a still stranger coincidence, for Tasuun is also our destination. We take with us the resurrected girl Arctela, whom I have deemed too fair for the charnel god and his ghouls."

Phariom divined the dark evil that lay behind the oily, mocking speeches of the necromancer. Also, he saw the furtive and sinister sign that Abnon-Tha had made to his assistants. Weaponless, he could only give a formal assent to the sardonic proposal. He knew well that he would not be permitted to leave the temple alive, for the narrow eyes of Narghai and Vemba-Tsith, regarding him closely, were alight with the red lust of murder.

"Come," said Abnon-Tha, in a voice of imperious command, "it is time to go." He turned to the still figure of Arctela and spoke an unknown word. With vacant eyes and noctambulistic paces, she followed at his heels as he stepped toward the open door. Phariom had helped Elaith to her feet, and was whispering words of reassurance in an effort to lull the growing horror and confused alarm that he saw in her eyes. She was able to walk, albeit slowly and uncertainly. Vemba-Tsith and Narghai drew back, motioning that she and Phariom should precede them; but Phariom, sensing their intent to slay him as soon as his back was turned, obeyed unwillingly and looked desperately about for something that he could seize as a weapon.

One of the metal braziers, full of smoldering coals, was at his very feet. He stooped quickly, lifted it in his hands, and turned upon the necromancers. Vemba-Tsith, as he had suspected, was prowling toward him with upraised sword, and was making ready to strike. Phariom hurled the brazier and its glowing contents full in the necromancer's face, and Vemba-Tsith went down with a terrible, smothered cry. Narghai, snarling ferociously, leapt forward to assail the defenseless youth. His simitar gleamed with a wicked luster in the lurid glare of the urns as he swung it back for the blow. But the weapon did not fall; and Phariom, steeling himself against the impending death, became aware that Narghai was staring beyond him as if petrified by the vision of some Gorgonian specter.

As if compelled by another will than his own, the youth turned—and saw the thing that had arrested Narghai's blow. Arctela and Abnon-Tha, pausing before the open door, were outlined against a colossal shadow that was not wrought by anything in the room. It filled the portals from side to side, it towered above the lintel—and then, swiftly, it became more than a shadow: it was a bulk of darkness, black and opaque, that somehow blinded the eyes with a strange dazzlement. It seemed to suck the flame from the red urns and fill the chamber with a chill of utter death and voidness. Its form was that of a worm-shapen column, huge as a dragon, its further coils still issuing from

the gloom of the corridor; but it changed from moment to moment, swirling and spinning as if alive with the vortical energies of dark eons. Briefly it took the semblance of some demoniac giant with eyeless head and limbless body; and then, leaping and spreading like smoky fire, it swept forward into the chamber.

Abnon-Tha fell back before it, with frantic mumblings of malediction or exorcism; but Arctela, pale and slight and motionless, remained full in its path, while the thing enfolded her and enveloped her with a hungry flaring until she was hidden wholly from view.

PHARIOM, supporting Elaith, who leaned weakly on his shoulder as if about to swoon, was powerless to move. He forgot the murderous Narghai, and it seemed that he and Elaith were but faint shadows in the presence of embodied death and dissolution. He saw the blackness grow and wax with the towering of fed flame as it closed about Arctela; and he saw it gleam with eddying hues of somber iris, like the spectrum of a sable sun. For an instant, he heard a soft and flame-like murmuring. Then, quickly and terribly, the thing ebbed from the room. Arctela was gone, as if she had dissolved like a phantom on the air. Borne on a sudden gust of strangely mingled heat and cold, there came an acrid odor, such as would rise from a burnt-out funeral pyre.

"Mordiggian!" shrilled Narghai, in hysteric terror. "It was the god Mordiggian! He has taken Arctela!"

It seemed that his cry was answered by a score of sardonic echoes, unhuman as the howling of hyenas, and yet articulate, that repeated the name Mordiggian. Into the room, from the dark hall, there poured a horde of creatures whose violet robes alone identified them in Phariom's eyes as the priests of the ghoul-god. They had removed the skull-like masks, revealing heads and faces that were half anthropomorphic, half canine, and wholly diabolic. Also, they had taken off the fingerless gloves. . . . There were at least a dozen of them. Their curving talons gleamed in the bloody light like hooks of darkly tarnished metal; their spiky teeth, longer than coffin-nails, protruded from snarling lips. They closed like a ring of jackals on Abnon-Tha and Narghai, driving them back into the farthest corner. Several others, entering tardily, fell with a bestial ferocity on Vemba-Tsith, who had begun to revive, and was moaning and writhing on the floor amid the scattered coals of the brazier.

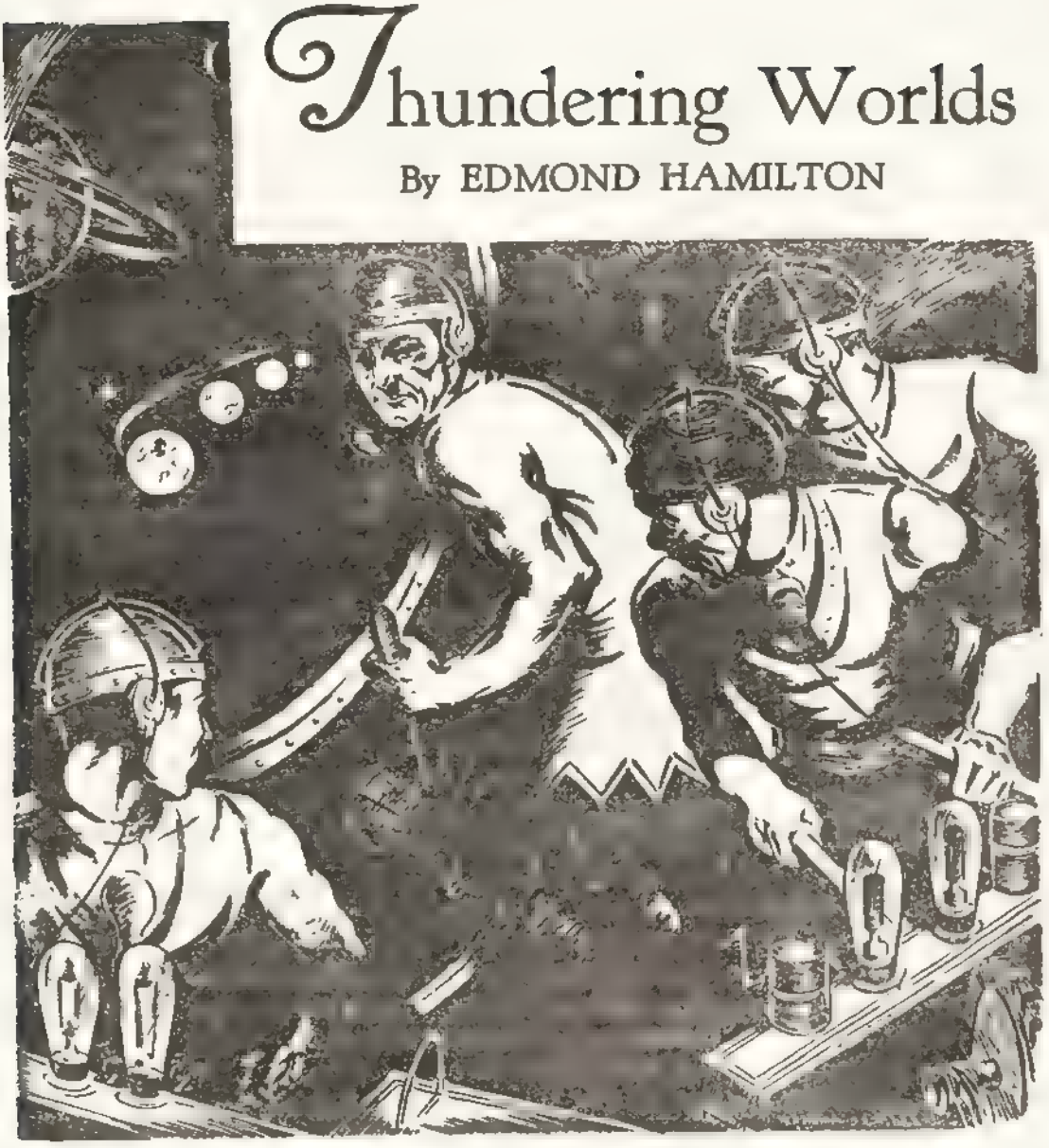
They seemed to ignore Phariom and Elaith, who stood looking on as if in some baleful trance. But the hindmost, ere he joined the assailants of Vemba-Tsith, turned to the youthful pair and addressed them in a hoarse, hollow voice, like a tomb-reverberate barking:

"Go, for Mordiggian is a just god, who claims only the dead, and has no concern with the living. And we, the priests of Mordiggian, deal in our own fashion with those who would violate his law by removing the dead from the temple."

Phariom, with Elaith still leaning on his shoulder, went out into the dark hall, hearing a hideous clamor in which the screams of men were mingled with a growling as of jackals, a laughter as of hyenas. The clamor ceased as they entered the blue-lit sanctuary and passed toward the outer corridor; and the silence that filled Mordiggian's fane behind them was deep as the silence of the dead on the black altar-table.

Thundering Worlds

By EDMOND HAMILTON



"He felt the awful responsibility of his position, the power to guide the whole world through space."

A colossal thrill-tale of the distant future, when our Earth and the other planets leave the dying sun on a stupendous voyage to distant stars in search of light and heat

STANDING with Hurg of Venus at the window, I pointed up at a number of dark, long shapes sinking out of the gray sky. "There come our fellow Council-members," I said.

Hurg nodded. "Yes, Lonnat—that first ship looks like that of Tolarg of Pluto, and the next two are those of Murdat of Uranus and Zintnor of Mars."

"And the last one is that of Runnal of Earth," I added. "Well, the solar system's peoples will soon know how we of the Council decide on the plan, whether it's accepted or rejected."

"Most of them are praying it will be accepted," Hurg said. "If it were not for Wald of Jupiter and your enemy, Tolarg of Pluto, I would be sure it would be accepted, but as it is——"

He lapsed into thoughtful silence and I too was silent with my thoughts as we gazed out of the window. The panorama that stretched before us was enough to make any man think.

We were gazing across the city of dome-shaped metal buildings that completely covered the planet Mercury. Many flyers, torpedo-shaped craft propelled by atomic blasts, swarmed over the city, rising from or descending into the heat-locks at the tops of the buildings. In the snow-sheathed streets between the buildings no people at all were to be seen. Long ago Mercury had grown too cold for life in the open.

Mercury cold? Mercury, the innermost of the sun's nine planets, that had once been heated almost to furnace-temperatures by the blazing sun? That had been many ages before, though, when the sun was hot and yellow and in the full tide of its middle-life. It was not such a sun that hung in the gray heavens over Mercury now. No, the sun above us was a huge sullen blood-red disk, a darkening crimson sun which gave forth little heat and light. It was a sun that was dying!

Yes, our sun was dying! It no longer cast out a flood of heat and light on its nine planets, and the others were even icier and colder than this one of Mercury. Long ago in the past, men had journeyed out from the planet of their origin, the world Earth, to the sun's other worlds. They had colonized all the nine planets from Mercury to Pluto, until each held a great human population. Their interplanetary ships filled the ways between the worlds, and the whole system was ruled by a Council of Nine in which each member represented the planet of which he was the head.

This stable civilization of man in the solar system had lasted for ages upon ages. It had seemed that nothing could ever threaten it. But it was threatened at last and by a most awful menace. The sun was cooling! It was changing from yellow to red, following the course that every sun follows, and as it cooled, its planets became colder and colder. Their peoples were forced to live in cities of artificially heated dome-buildings, and move about in enclosed, warmed flyers. And still the sun cooled until men saw that in the near future it would become completely dead and dark, and that life upon its worlds would then be impossible in the awful cold.

The Council of Nine considered this situation. Julud of Saturn, ranking member of the Council and as such its chairman, called on the scientists of the solar system to suggest a way to save humanity. Many plans were proposed, and finally one plan, a stupendous one, was put forward as the one way by which humanity's continued life could be assured. It was verified in every detail by the scientists. Now we of the Council were going to vote on whether or not the plan should be followed, and I, Lonnat of Mercury, meant to cast my world's vote in favor of it. So did my friend Hurg of Venus and most of the other members, but one or two of the nine were doubtful.

Hurg was looking up now at the enormous dull-red sun that swung overhead. In the gray sky around it shone the bright points of the nearer stars, now visible by day.

"We've got the one real answer to that dying sun," I said, "if all the Council's members will see it!"

"They must!" Hurg exclaimed. "In this crisis we've got to forget our indi-

vidual worlds and think only of the whole nine!"

"I fear we won't do that while Tolarg and Wald are of us," I said. "But enough —here come the others now."

They were coming down into the round, metal-walled Council chamber in which we two were. These other members of the Council were clad like Hurg and me in sleeveless tunics and knee-length shorts, each wearing on his shoulder the insignia of his planet, the arrow of Mars or square of Uranus, and so on.

JULUD of Saturn and Runnal of Earth were the first to reach our side. Julud, our chairman, was a thin, white-haired old man with a noble face. Runnal of Earth was tall and forceful, and in his gray eyes shone the audacious humor characteristic of his world's people.

"So Hurg is here before the rest of us," smiled Julud as we greeted them. "I was detained on Saturn by the final rechecking our Saturnian scientists were giving the details of the plan."

"They checked all right?" I asked, and Julud nodded.

"Yes, our scientists repeated their decision that the plan was perfectly practicable."

"So did the scientists of Earth," Runnal told us.

Zintnor of Mars and Wald of Jupiter had joined us, and the big Wald shook his head. "Our Jovian scientists say the same," he said, "but nevertheless I hesitate to risk my world on what is, after all, only a theoretical scheme."

"Why not risk it?" Zintnor asked him curtly. "All of us will be risking our planets too."

"Yes, but as representative of the largest planet——" Wald was saying ponderously, when Hurg nudged me.

"Here comes your friend, Lonnat—Tolarg of Pluto."

Tolarg strode into our group almost insolently, with Murdat of Uranus and Noll of Neptune by his side. He saw me, and his black eyes and saturnine face became mocking in expression.

"Well, Lonnat," he greeted me, "here we all are on your toy planet Mercury once more, though it seems hardly big enough to hold all nine of us."

I was about to retort when Runnal of Earth intervened. "It is hardly the size of a planet that measures its importance, Tolarg," he said calmly. "My own Earth is not large," he added proudly, "but I think no planet in the solar system has been of more importance."

"I meant no offense," said Tolarg, his mocking smile belying his words. "In fact, I really rather like Mercury—it reminds me of the satellites of our outer planets."

I controlled my temper and kept silent by an effort, though I could see Murdat of Uranus and Noll of Neptune smiling.

"It seems to me," said Julud of Saturn, "that since we are all here, the sooner we open our meeting the better."

Zintnor agreed impatiently. "I didn't come all the way in from Mars to hear these stale jests of Tolarg's," he said, and got a black look from the Plutonian in return as we took our seats.

JULUD of Saturn faced us from the dais of the chairman, a sheaf of papers in his hand. He spoke calmly to us.

"There is no need for me to rehearse what has brought us here today," he said. "We must make today the gravest decision that the human race has ever been called on to make.

"Our sun is dying. Our nine worlds' peoples are menaced by awful and increasing cold, and unless something is

done soon their inhabitants will perish. We can not hope to revive our dying sun. Its doom is already close at hand. But out in space there lie other suns, other stars, many of them young and hot with life. If our nine worlds revolved around one of those hotter, younger suns, we could look forward to new ages of life for our race.

"It has been proposed, therefore, that we cause our nine worlds to leave our dying sun and voyage across space to one of those other suns! That our nine planets be torn loose from our sun and steered out into space like nine great ships in quest of a new sun among the countless suns of the universe! That we carry out a colossal migration of worlds through the vast interstellar spaces!

"This stupendous plan to voyage out from our sun into space on our nine worlds has a sound scientific basis. Our worlds can be propelled in space under their own power just as our space-ships are. Our ships, as you know, are moved through the void by atom-blasts that fire backward and thus by their reaction hurl the ship forward. It is possible to apply this principle on a vast scale to our planets, to fit our worlds with colossal atom-blasts which will fire backward with unthinkable power and push our worlds forward in space!

"Our worlds would be so fitted with atom-blasts that they could move at will in space, could turn in any desired direction. They would become in effect vast ships, and just as a ship has its controls centered, so would our worlds' propulsion-blasts have their controls concentrated so that one man could guide each world, at will.

"The plan is that our worlds should by this means tear loose from the sun's hold and voyage out into space in a great column or chain. The worlds with moons would take their satellites with them, of course. The nine planets would head toward the nearest sun, which is the yellow star Nugat. It would only take months to reach Nugat, as our sun is much nearer to other stars than it was in ages past.

"If Nugat proved satisfactory as a sun for our worlds, they would be guided into orbits around it. If it was not satisfactory they would go on to the next nearest suns, to Antol or Mithak or Walaz or Vira or others. They would voyage on through the starry spaces until they found a sun satisfactory to them, and when they found it they would halt there and become planets of that sun!

"During the voyage through sunless space our worlds would receive no heat or light, of course. But during that time our peoples could live in their dome-cities by means of artificial heat and light. And though in the intense cold of space our worlds' atmospheres would freeze, preparation to assure an artificial air-supply could be made. There would be hardships during the great voyage, but it should not prove disastrous.

"This is the plan on which we are to vote today. Every detail of it has been checked many times by the scientists of our worlds and pronounced practicable. If we decide in favor of it, work will begin at once on the fitting of our worlds with the propulsion-blasts. If we decide against it another plan will have to be found. Do any of you wish to be enlightened further on any detail of it before we make our decision?"

As Julud paused, Murdat of Uranus rose to his feet, his face anxious.

"I would like to understand more fully the procedure by which our planets will leave the sun and move through space," he said.

"I too," said Noll of Neptune. "In what order will our worlds start?"

Julud consulted the papers in his hand. "According to the plan," he said, "Pluto, our outermost world, will start first. It will be followed by Neptune, then by Uranus, and the other planets will follow in order with Mercury last. This is so that the outer planets will be gone and out of the way when the inner planets cross their orbits on the way out. It will remove all chances of collisions.

"On their way through space, the nine planets will proceed in a long column in the same order, with Pluto first and Mercury last. When they find a satisfactory sun they will take up orbits around it in relatively the same position as their present orbits around this sun."

Tolarg of Pluto rose. "Why take this little worldlet of Mercury along with us?" "We could take its people on one of the other planets and thus not have to be bothered with it."

"You can't abandon Mercury, no matter how small it is! It's as important as Pluto or any other world!" I cried.

"Lonnat is right!" Hurg of Venus seconded me. "Mercury had cities on it when Pluto was just a ball of ice!"

"That will do," Julud said peremptorily to us. "Tolarg, your suggestion is out of order. Neither Mercury nor any other world will be left behind when and if we start."

"But what about Jupiter?" Wald asked anxiously. "It is all very well for you to move your worlds, but Jupiter is bigger than all of them and will be a different matter. It'll be more risky."

Julud shook his head. "Wald, if the calculations of our scientists are followed, Jupiter can be guided through space as surely as the other worlds. You take no more risk with your world than the rest of us with ours."

There was a pause, and then Julud addressed himself to all of us. There was a tremor in his voice that he could not quite prevent.

"If no one has further questions to ask, the time has come for our decision on this proposal. The nine worlds wait to hear that decision, so now think well before you make it. If you vote against this plan, then we cling to our dying sun that our race has always known; and though with its dying, death will overtake all on our worlds, it may be that our science can spin out existence for us for a longer time than we now think.

"If you vote for the plan, you enter our worlds on a great risk; for risk there will be despite all the calculations of our scientists. You enter our worlds on a colossal adventure, the tremendous voyage of nine planets out into the starry spaces. That voyage will mean either death soon for our worlds or a new life, a new sun to warm and light them, a boundless future again open to our race. You have heard the plan—now vote against or for it!"

With the words Julud of Saturn raised his right hand, showing himself voting in favor of the plan. The hands of Hurg and Zintnor and myself shot up almost at the same moment. More slowly and thoughtfully Runnal of Earth and Noll of Neptune raised theirs.

Murdat of Uranus had his hand up now to record his world for the plan, and there remained only Tolarg of Pluto and Wald of Jupiter. And Tolarg was calmly raising his hand—only Wald was left now!

We waited tensely. One vote would defeat the plan, and from the first Jupiter had been strongest against it. Then a roar ripped from us as at last Wald slowly, gravely, raised his hand. Shouting, we were on our feet.

Julud bent forward solemnly. "We have decided," he said, "and now we have staked man and man's nine worlds irrevocably on the issue. As soon as we can make ready, then, our planets will start out into space on their mighty voyage in quest of a new sun!"

2

TOLARG of Pluto was visible in one section of my televisor screen, speaking from the control-tower on Pluto. "All ready," the Plutonian reported. "In five minutes we start."

Julud's anxious face appeared on another section of the screen. "You will be certain to start at the calculated moment, Tolarg? It is vital that our worlds move out in the calculated order."

"Do not fear," Tolarg answered confidently. Then he must have caught sight of me in a section of his own screen, for he waved mockingly to me. "Farewell, Lonnat. Don't forget to bring your baby planet after the rest of us."

He laughed and those around him laughed. I wanted to make a retort into the televisor, but restrained myself.

I stood in the circular, many-windowed room at the top of the Mercury control-tower. On each planet had been built a tower in which were concentrated the controls of the atom-blasts that would propel that planet through space. And now each one of us nine of the Council, from Tolarg out on Pluto to me here on Mercury, were ready with our scientist-assistants in our control-towers, since the time had come for the start of our planets into space.

Around me in the room were the banks of shining levers that controlled Mercury's propulsion-blasts. Also in the room were the myriad instruments necessary to guide our world in its flight through space, the great telescopic and spectroscopic instruments and other astronomical equipment. Also there was a great televisor whose screen was divided into eight sections, each one of which gave me vision into the control-tower of one of the other planets.

In the various sections of it I could see Tolarg in the Pluto control-tower, his assistants standing at the controls ready to start the planet; Noll and Murdat in the towers of Neptune and Uranus, ready to follow with their worlds; Julud anxiously waiting for Tolarg's start; Wald of Jupiter waiting with troubled brow for his mighty world's take-off; Zintnor of Mars and Runnal of Earth impatiently watching from their planets' towers; and Hurg smiling at me from the control-tower on Venus. By this means we could communicate freely with one another during our worlds' flight, as well as using our ships to go from one world to another in mid-flight.

In the Pluto tower, Tolarg was watching the time-dial. In minutes more Pluto would hurtle out into the void away from the sun, starting the great migration of our nine worlds. A tenseness was upon us all as we watched for the moment, a tenseness born of the suspense of the past months of preparations. For the months that had passed since we of the Council of Nine had voted to follow the great plan, had been ones of feverish preparation.

Every world had to be fitted with the huge atom-blasts that would propel it in space, and also had to be made ready so that its people could live during the voyage through the sunless void. The greatest labor had been the fitting of the atom-blasts. This was a task so titanic that only by devoting almost all the energies of our planets' peoples to it were we able to complete it in so short a time.

Huge pits miles across and many miles deep were sunk in each planet at three

points around its equator. These pits were metal-lined and thus were in fact stupendous tubes sunk in the planet. At the bottom of them was the apparatus for exploding the matter there, blowing its atoms into streams of electrons and protons that shot out of the huge tubes with inconceivable force. This tremendous force would be enough to propel the planet in the opposite direction. By using the suitable one of the three huge blasts, the world could be propelled in any desired course.

It was necessary, of course, that each planet should have its propulsion-blasts controlled from a single spot. So the control-towers had been built, one on each of the nine worlds, and fitted with all necessary aids for the navigation of our worlds on their tremendous voyage. Each one of us was to have charge of his planet's guidance, with a corps of scientists to assist him and relieve him at the controls and chart the path to be followed through space.

Besides these preparations it was needful to make the nine worlds ready so that their peoples could exist during the voyage. This was a simpler task, for though it would be terrible cold and dark on the worlds once we had launched out from our sun, our peoples were already more or less used to cold and absence of light. In their cities of heated domes they could exist, and arrangements had been made to supply air to the buildings, as it was foreseen that the cold would be so intense that our worlds' atmospheres would freeze.

So now all these preparations were finished and the great moment had come when Pluto, first of our nine planets, was to start forth on this awful voyage.

I LOOKED from the televisor to the time-dial beside it, which almost indicated the prearranged time at which Pluto was to start. In the televisor I could see Hurg and all the others watching intently.

Then one of the scientists in the Pluto control-tower spoke a single word to Tolarg, at the controls. "Time!"

Tolarg rapidly depressed six levers, and the tower on Pluto quivered violently. "We're off!" he exclaimed.

I turned quickly to one of the telescopes in my own tower, gazed through it at Pluto. The planet was a little brown ball out there at the solar system's edge. And now from that little ball tiny jets of fire seemed darting backward in steady succession. They were the great atom-blasts of Pluto, firing regularly backward. And as they fired, the little planet was beginning slowly to leave its accustomed orbit and move away from the sun, out into the great void where burned the hosts of distant stars.

I was awed despite myself. There was something so tremendous about this starting out of the planet into space under its own power. Watching in the telescope I could see it moving farther and farther off its orbit, booming out into the infinite with every atom-blast at its rear firing as Tolarg calmly steered it on. And far out there in space shone the yellow star that was to be our first goal, the yellow sun Nugat. Faster and faster Pluto was moving toward it and was already well out from our sun and its other eight worlds.

"Neptune's next," came Julud's voice from the televisor. "All ready, Noll?"

"We are ready to go in two minutes," Noll of Neptune answered quietly.

Julud nodded. "Be sure not to follow Pluto too closely, so there'll be no danger of your moon colliding with it."

Noll nodded quietly. The rest of us watched, and then as the two minutes passed I went again to the telescope.

When the moment had come, I saw the little fire-jets shooting back from

Neptune's little green sphere also. And rapidly at mounting speed Neptune too was moving out from its orbit, heading after Pluto. As I watched, I saw that Neptune's moon, Triton, was moving out with its parent-planet, still circling around it as it sailed out from its orbit.

This was a relief to all of us, especially to those of us whose planets had moons, for there had been a little doubt as to whether the satellites would follow their worlds. But Triton clung to Neptune as it launched outward after Pluto. And now Pluto and Neptune, one behind the other, were moving out toward the distant yellow star of Nugat.

It was Uranus' turn next. Murdat waited until Pluto and Neptune were even farther out before he started his planet after them. Uranus was a splendid sight as it started, a pale-green planet with a family of four moons that continued to circle it steadily as it moved away. Murdat headed his world directly after Neptune, so that the chain of two worlds had by now become one of three.

Then it was the turn of Saturn, the planet of our chairman Julud. It had been necessary to fit the huge atom-blasts on Saturn in special positions because of that planet's vast rings. Now when Julud drove his planet out after the other three, double-blasts of fire shot back from it. Only slowly did this, the second largest of the sun's worlds, get under way. Saturn was a magnificent sight as with its encircling rings and ten thronging moons it thundered out after Pluto and Neptune and Uranus.

Four planets were now well under way, moving in a chain through the void with Pluto first and Saturn last. And now had come the most risky moment of the entire start, the start of Jupiter. Jupiter, the monarch of the solar system, was so colossal in size that it required immense forces to move it at all, and for that reason its people had always been nervous about this mighty undertaking.

We watched tensely as Wald started his giant world. Terrific streams of fire shot back from the planet's mighty mass as its atom-blasts were turned on. It seemed not to change position at all. Not so easily was great Jupiter to be torn from the sun! Again and again the blasts fired, until at last, slowly and ponderously, the great world and its nine moons began veering outward from its orbit.

The blasts continued to fire, time after time, until Jupiter was moving out at a speed equal to the other four worlds that had started, and following them in space. We all breathed more easily at that. For the four planets that were left were comparatively small and there should be no trouble in getting them under way now that the huger outer planets had started.

ZINTNOR's world, Mars, was next. The fiery Martian chafed impatiently until it was time to start, and then his red world and its two tiny moons shot outward with tremendous speed as he opened his back-blasts with all their power. The little red ball of Mars sped out into space after Jupiter's mighty white globe, looking like a belated satellite trying to catch up with its parent-planet, a comparison that would have aroused Zintnor's wrath.

Pluto, Neptune, Uranus, Saturn, Jupiter and Mars under way—and Earth next. Already Runnal of Earth was starting his planet after the others. And now, as his world and its single moon started out after Mars and the others, something tightened in the throats of all of us who watched; something strange that we felt at seeing Earth leaving the sun.

Earth, the parent-world of our human race, had always had a special place in our

hearts. Even those of us whose ancestors for a thousand generations back have been born on Pluto or Saturn or one of the other worlds, feel somehow when we visit Earth for the first time that we are getting home. The gray planet with its beautiful moon is more than just one of the nine worlds, and so it was with more than ordinary emotion that we now watched it go.

Now only Venus and my own world of Mercury were left, and the time was at hand for Venus to start.

"Good-bye, Lonnat," said Hurg from the televisor-screen. "Here goes my world too!"

"And then mine the last," I said smilingly. "The tail end of the procession, so to speak."

"Well, that's the proper place for the littlest world, isn't it?" Hurg grinned.

In the telescope then I saw the great back-blasts of fire from Hurg's cloudy planet. Venus too was starting. I watched as it sped on after the others, out away from the sun after the great chain of worlds that was now marching steadily into the void, with Pluto in the lead. Venus took its place at the end of that chain, and moved on with it.

And now Mercury alone was left of all the sun's worlds. Little Mercury, held close to the dying sun as though it were loth to let this, the last of its children, leave it. As I walked to the great bank of control-levers, ready to send my planet out after the others, I felt strangely lonely, oppressed.

I held the levers in my hand as the time-dial's hands crept onward. About me my assistants were ready at other levers and instruments. The awful responsibility of my position, the power that was mine to guide a whole world through space at will, weighed upon me. With an effort I remained calm. Then as the time-dial indicated the moment, I threw down the levers.

Instantly the control-tower, the whole planet, was shaken by a shuddering convulsion and there came to our ears the tremendous roar of the atom-blasts firing back from our world. The starry heavens seemed to jerk and quiver as Mercury lurched forward under the impetus of the back-blasts. And as it moved faster I threw down other levers, fired the side-blasts that drove us outward from our orbit. Tensely I watched, firing blast after blast as I guided Mercury out after the chain of other worlds.

Mercury lurched and swayed as I steered the planet outward. Ahead moved the column of the eight other planets, eight mighty worlds thundering through the void toward the distant yellow star, with Pluto leading and the other worlds with their families of moons solemnly following. And as Mercury moved after them with increasing speed, the light faded on its surface and its atmosphere began to freeze and fall in great flakes. I looked back at the sun we were leaving.

There it spun, the crimson sun, old, waning, dying. Planetless now, the nine worlds that long ago had been born from it leaving it. And as Mercury left it last of all, the significance of it struck home to my heart. We were leaving the sun where mankind and its world had come into existence, the sun that for millions of generations had been *the* sun, the sun beneath which man had grown great.

I flung back my hand wordlessly toward that diminishing, dying star. I wanted to speak to it as though to a dying, conscious parent whom we were leaving, but I could only make that gesture. And in that gesture, as my world sped out after the other worlds into the great void with

its atmosphere freezing and falling, man bade farewell to his sun for ever.

3

JULUD of Saturn spoke to me from my televisor-screen. "Tolarg reports that Pluto is within ten billion miles of the sun Nugat, Lonnat!" he told me.

"That's good!" I exclaimed. "We won't be much longer reaching it, then."

Hurg of Venus spoke from another section of the televisor. "As for me, I don't care how soon we reach it. I'm getting pretty tired of this journey and I don't care who knows it."

Julud smiled. "We'll all be glad when it ends, I think. And if Nugat proves a satisfactory sun, as we think it will, the journey will end here. Our scientists report that this sun is a young and hot one, which promises well. They also say it has two planets and some strange radiation-lines in its spectrum."

"You're going to send ships ahead to investigate the sun before our worlds reach it, aren't you?" I asked, and Julud nodded.

"Yes, when we get a little closer a scouting force of ships will go ahead and see what the sun and its worlds are like."

He and Hurg disappeared from the televisor, and I turned from it to stare out the control-tower's window. About me in the tower were some of my scientist-assistants, who never ceased their watch over our instruments as we guided Mercury through the void after the other planets. Outside the tower stretched Mercury's surface, its countless dome-buildings now covered by a blanket of frozen air and lying in unchanging darkness relieved only by the light of the stars.

Ahead of our speeding world, against those stars, I could make out the vague light-points of the other eight worlds whose columns we were following through space. Their formation was the same as when we had started months before, with great Pluto thundering in the van under the guidance of Tolarg. I wondered how the self-confident Plutonian liked the task of leading the nine worlds on their march through the void. Far behind us burned the red star that was the sun we had left months before.

And ahead there shone the sun toward which we were moving, the yellow star Nugat. It had grown steadily in brightness as we approached it, and now we were so near that it presented a visible disk, a small yellow sun in seeming. It gleamed now like a great yellow star of hope, for we all hoped that we could halt our journey here.

Our hopes grew in the next days as we drew even closer to Nugat. It was growing in visible size and seemed in every way suitable as a sun for our nine worlds. It had two planets of its own, but we could easily allow for them in guiding our world into orbits around it. Also the strange radiation from it mentioned by Julud continued to puzzle our scientists, but we gave little attention to it.

When we were within six billion miles of Nugat, Julud called me again on the televisor.

"You will command a scouting expedition to go ahead and explore the sun, Lonnat," he told me. "Take a hundred ships."

"Why not give me the task?" asked Tolarg from Pluto on the televisor. "I'm nearer to Nugat than Lonnat is, and it would save time."

"It is my order," Julud said calmly. "You will start at once, Lonnat."

As I turned to go I caught sight of Hurg's rueful face in another section of the televisor. "Cheer up, Hurg," I told

him. "When I get back I'll tell you all about it."

"The only reason they send you is because it doesn't matter what happens to your puny little planet," Hurg retorted, and then we both laughed.

I gave my scientist-assistants instructions on maintaining Mercury on its course during my absence. Then our hundred ships tore up from Mercury and started forward.

OUR ships could, of course, move much faster in space than our worlds were moving. So, flying ahead at top speed, we soon passed Venus, then Earth, Mars, Jupiter and all the others one by one. To save time we went close past the column of worlds, cutting in between them and their circling moons and speeding ahead until we were past Pluto and shooting ahead toward the yellow sun Nugat.

Our speed was so great that we were soon far ahead of our nine moving worlds. On we shot, until the blazing yellow disk of Nugat had become a huge sphere of golden fire in the heavens before us. We headed toward its two planets, that spun close together off to one side of the sun, and as I felt the flood of blistering heat and dazzling light that poured upon us I saw in it a wonderful sun for our worlds.

I felt also at the same time a strange tingling through all my body, one that became steadily stronger and more disconcerting, but did not pay much attention to the phenomenon at the time, so engrossed was I with our task. We were close to one of the two planets now, and were descending rapidly toward its surface, when from one of the scentists in my ship who were training their astronomical instruments upon Nugat came a cry.

"This sun is giving off radiations unlike anything our own sun ever produced!" he cried. "Do you feel anything strange?"

"A sort of tingling," I said. "What is it?"

"It's radio-active radiation—rays that crumble and disintegrate matter!" he cried. "This sun must have a great mass of gaseous radio-active matter in it and is pouring out waves that are deadly to all life!"

"But there's life on the world below us!" cried someone else. "Look—those things!"

We were still dropping low toward the planet we had been approaching and could now see its surface. It was a world of nightmare, a radio-active planet! Its whole mass shone dimly with white light, and it was evident that this radio-active world, child of a radium sun, was itself constantly giving off deadly radiation. A planet upon which no conceivable living thing could exist!

Yet there was life upon it! It was such life as we would never have deemed possible had we not seen it. The living things we saw below were things of shining matter whose bodies were glowing and disintegrating and changing even as they moved about! They were radio-active creatures of this deadly world!

We glimpsed swarms of them, moving to and fro amid buildings and streets that were themselves built of glowing, disintegrating matter. We even saw, some distance off from their weird city, the glowing waves of a great radium sea or ocean whose whole liquid mass must have been composed of radio-active elements.

Then one of my pilots cried, "Look, our ship is beginning to glow and disintegrate too! And the others!"

I stared, amazed. Our ship was glowing dimly with a waxing white light, and

small fragments were breaking from it here and there. And the other ships too were shining.

"Quick, out of here!" I shouted. "It's death for us to stay near this sun longer."

"And death for our nine worlds too if they come closer to this sun!" another cried. "We must get back to them, they must be turned aside!"

Our ships whirled upward. The tingling in our bodies had now become a wrenching that seemed tearing the atoms of our tissues apart. As we shot outward from the radio-active sun and its shining pair of worlds I thought that we were about to perish. But as we drew away from Nugat and out of the stronger zone of its deadly radiation, our ships ceased to glow and the worst of the sickness left us. We headed back at top speed toward our oncoming nine worlds.

In brief words there I reported to Julud the danger of approaching closer to the radium sun. Promptly Julud gave orders for all our worlds to turn aside from it at once so that we would pass it at a safe distance. By the time I got back to the control-tower on Mercury, Pluto was already turning aside at the head of our column and the other worlds following its lead. I shifted Mercury's course to follow them.

We headed past Nugat and toward the next nearest sun, the yellow star Antol. As we passed Nugat we all watched anxiously, but we were at a distance that kept us out of the stronger of its deadly radiations. Even so, passing it was a risky business, for its pull upon us was great. Julud and Wald in particular had an anxious time with Saturn and Jupiter and had to fire continually side-blasts toward Nugat to keep the great sun from pulling their worlds out of their course.

But at last we were all past and the devil-sun that would have destroyed all life on our worlds was dropping behind. Antol now was our goal, and this meant that our months of voyaging through space must be repeated before we could reach that sun. And if Antol, like Nugat, proved unsatisfactory as a sun for us, we must go on from it to some of the other nearer stars, to Mithak or Walaz or Vira or other suns beyond. It was a discouraging prospect, for we had hoped that our voyage of worlds would end at Nugat.

ON AND on in the next months, steadily forward through the starry spaces forged our travelling worlds. Nugat contracted again to a yellow star behind us, and again the sunless void was about us, again we kept ceaseless watch as we drove our worlds through the great emptiness. Still in the van led dark Pluto; still after it came the other planets one by one; still my own little world of Mercury followed last of all in this mighty voyage.

Our hopes rose once more, as after months of this tremendous journeying the yellow sun Antol grew in size and brightness ahead. Julud announced that according to our astronomers Antol was in its late youth and that it had four planets. It had in its spectrum none of the mysterious radiations we had found so deadly at Nugat, and though our astronomers said that there were some peculiarities in its physical make-up, they saw no reason why it should not be the sun we sought.

So our hopes again grew as we drew near to Antol. When within twelve billion miles of it, our scientists found that its four worlds were apparently habitable. They had found also that Antol's physical makeup was of an odd type apparently rare among suns, but repeated that the yellow sun should prove a sufficient source

of heat and light for our worlds. When within eight billion miles of it, Julud announced that on the next day he would send another scouting force ahead to investigate Antol and its worlds, as we had done at Nugat.

But that night, though night and day were the same unchanging dusk as respects light, there came a sudden alarm from Tolarg of Pluto.

"Pluto is being attacked by strange spherical ships in immense numbers!" Tolarg cried. "They outnumber us and are trying to destroy us!"

"Saturn has just been attacked also!" Julud exclaimed. "Are any other planets assailed?"

"Yes, Neptune has been descended upon by floods of spheres!" Noll cried. "They are fighting over this control-tower with our ships!"

"And Uranus too!" came Murdat's shout. "They seem to be coming from ahead."

"They must be creatures of Antol's worlds!" Julud cried. "Creatures who have come to meet us and are attacking our first four worlds!"

4

"EVERY ship in the last five worlds come to our aid at once!" Julud commanded. "These creatures must be repelled before they overpower us!"

"Keep Mercury in its course after the other worlds," I cried to my scientist-assistants. "I'm going ahead with our ships."

In minutes every space-ship that we of Mercury possessed was darting up from our world and tearing ahead through space. I was in the foremost ship, and as we flew on our crews made ready the ship's weapons, atom-blasts that shot forth highly concentrated streams of atomic force that had great range and enormous destructive power.

As our ships shot past Venus we were joined by the ships of that world, with Hurg at their head. Already the ships of Earth and Mars and Jupiter were on their way forward with Runnal and Zintnor and Wald leading them. We were all heading for the four first worlds of our moving column, Pluto and Neptune and Uranus and Saturn, since it was these that had been so suddenly and terribly attacked.

The ships of Jupiter and Mars and Earth went on to aid the first three planets, leaving the forces of Hurg and myself to succor Saturn. We tore in toward the ringed planet, over twenty thousand ships strong, and darted down to take part in the wild and awful battle that was raging all around Saturn.

The scene over Saturn's surface was appalling. Space seemed filled with darting spheres, black metal balls of greater size than any of our ships. They were raining disks of white flame upon the dome-city that covered Saturn, and as the flame-disks fell they annihilated whatever they touched. Saturnian ships were battling the black spheres above the planet, using their atomic fire-blasts against the flame-disks of the spheres.

The Saturnians were badly outnumbered and were being overwhelmed as we appeared. Without hesitation our ships dived down into the wild struggle. Hurg and his Venerian craft were a little below my own, and I saw them crash into the battle and flash their fire-blasts right and left upon the swarming spheres. Then we too were in the thick of the fight, and space about us seemed choked with hurtling spheres and ships, with atomic fire-flashes and destroying flame-disks.

As calmly as I was able, I gave orders to our craft as Mercurian, Venerian and

Saturnian ships struggled with the spheres. I had a thousand kaleidoscopic glimpses of death dealt and averted. Two spheres loosed flame-disks at us, and our ship darted between them and drove fire-blasts to either side to destroy the spheres. A Venerian ship rammed a sphere and both exploded in flame. A Saturnian recklessly attacked three spheres and was annihilated by a half-dozen flame-disks.

The battle went on. Through the windows of the darting spheres I had momentary sight now and then of the creatures attacking us, black, formless things whose bodies seemed liquid! The fight now was raging out from the surface of Saturn. We were close to Saturn's rings, those mighty belts of whirling meteors that girdled the planet. Around and between the spinning rings and the planet's ten thronging moons our mad battle with the invaders went on. Ships and spheres blundered into death in the rings or crashed against the moons.

The scene was stupendous: the nine great worlds still thundering on in a column toward the glaring sun of Antol ahead; the creatures that had come from that sun's worlds attacking us in their spheres with the flame-disks; and we of three worlds struggling with them there amid the whirling rings and moons of Saturn, with death above and death below and the cold stars watching our mad fight.

The Antolians gave back! Their spheres had been halved in number by our fierce attack and they fled abruptly in the direction of Uranus.

"On to Uranus and Neptune and Pluto!" came Julud's cry from the televisors. "We must repel them there too!"

Our ships rushed on toward Uranus, the next world in the column. A fight still was raging around its moons, but as we attacked the Antolians there they fled ahead.

Now all our ships, with those of Uranus too, sped on toward Neptune and Pluto. We found Neptune already deserted by the invaders, but when we reached Pluto found that world in bad straits. Hosts of the spheres were overwhelming and destroying the Plutonian ships.

"Here's our chance to show Tolarg how we of the inner planets can fight!" came Hurg's yell from my televisor as we shot into the battle.

IF THE battle at Saturn had been fierce, the one at Pluto was terrific. The Antolians were in far greater numbers and seemed fiercely resolved to capture at least this one planet. They had concentrated their forces there now, and the fight that followed our reaching them was of the maddest kind.

Ships of every one of our nine worlds, Venerians and Mercurians and Earthmen, Jovians and Saturnians, ships with the square of Uranus or the oval of Neptune or the black bar of Pluto on them, dashed against the Antolian spheres in that tremendous battle. It seemed impossible that any ship could continue to exist in that hell of flying flame-disks and dancing atom-blasts. Wrecked spheres and ships rained in ruin upon the surface of Pluto.

But the Antolians could not stand the terrific onslaught we men of the nine worlds made upon them. They gave back into space from Pluto, then turned and dashed back toward their sun. From those in our ships came wild cheers as we saw them flee toward Antol. Then while our fleets continued to guard our advancing worlds, we nine of the council descended at Julud's command to meet in the Pluto control-tower.

"That attack nearly captured four of our worlds," Julud exclaimed. "They

would have done so had it not been for the aid of the inner planets."

"Yes, they of Mercury and Venus and the rest came in time," Tolarg conceded. "But why did these Antolians attack us? Why did they want to capture those four planets?"

"Some of the Antolians were captured," Runnal said. "We could question one telepathically and find out their reason."

"We'll do it," Julud said. "Have one of them brought in."

ONE of the Antolian prisoners was soon brought before us. The creature was utterly grotesque-looking. It was like the others we had glimpsed, a liquid creature whose body was simply a pool of thick, viscous black liquid. In this floated two eyes, and it could extend arms and limbs at will from its viscous mass. It was utterly unlike anything we had ever seen.

"It looks intelligent enough to receive and project thought," Julud said.

He projected a thought at the thing. "You are one of the inhabitants of the four worlds of Antol—the yellow sun ahead?"

"Yes," came the thing's thought-answer. "Our race is a mighty one and covers with its numbers all of those four worlds."

"Why did you attack our planets?"

"We saw them coming through space and wished to capture four of them, so that we could leave our sun in them," the Antolian answered.

"Leave your sun?" Julud repeated. "Why do you want to do that? Doesn't Antol give your worlds sufficient warmth and light?"

"It does," the Antolian replied, "but it is about to become a nova."

Cries burst from us. Antol about to become a nova! That meant that the sun would explode, expanding out to far greater size with inconceivable speed and destroying planets or anything else near to it!

"So that's why you want to leave it?" Hurg asked.

"Yes, for when it becomes a nova, which it will do very soon, it will destroy our worlds. We thought if we captured four of your travelling worlds we could move on them to another sun."

Julud looked at us. "We must not stop at Antol but go on toward another sun, then," he said.

It was so decided and we returned to our own planets. Then Pluto veered aside and after it our other planets until all were veering away from Antol. We had decided to head toward the next nearest sun, the orange sun Mithak, which lay not a great distance from Antol. As we drew away from Antol we expected another attack by the Antolians, but it did not come. We headed steadily on toward Mithak.

Looking back, we could see from disturbances in its physical appearance that the sun Antol was very near the point of explosion into a nova. Then not long after we left it, the explosion came. From a large yellow star behind us, Antol expanded suddenly into a terrific, dazzling sphere of light! It had burst into a sun hundreds of times larger than it had formerly been!

I looked to see the little light-flashes that would mark the destruction of its four planets in its fires, but saw nothing of the sort. Then I suddenly looked more intently. There against the fiery brilliance of Antol's fiery new sphere were four dark little points, coming on in a little column after us! They were the four worlds of Antol!

"The four Antolian worlds!" I cried

into the televisor. "They're coming after us—they escaped their sun's explosion!"

"Impossible!" Julud cried. "How could they move their worlds away from their sun?"

"In the same way we moved our worlds!" I cried. "They've imitated us and fitted atom-blasts on their worlds—they're following us and will dispute possession with our worlds of any sun we reach!"

5

"MITHAK a disappointment too, now that we've reached it! And the four Antolian worlds still following us! How long are our planets to continue this quest?"

It was Wald of Jupiter speaking in my televisor, and I heard Murdat answer from Uranus. "We can't go on indefinitely like this," he said. "Our peoples can't exist much longer on this terrible journey."

"I feared it would be so," said Wald. "Nugat unsuitable, Antol unsuitable, and now Mithak unsuitable—one sun after another we've reached and still we have to go on. Are our worlds to go on vainly searching space for a sun for themselves until all life on them is dead? Better to have stayed at our old sun, where at least we could have lived a little longer."

"Why this discouragement?" I demanded. "It's true that Mithak is impossible as a sun for us, but there are still Walaz and Vira beyond. One of them may be the sun we seek!"

"I say the same, Lonnat!" exclaimed Hurg of Venus.

But there came Tolarg's mocking voice from Pluto. "It's all right for you, Lonnat, your planet doesn't amount to much if it is lost."

"And what about those four Antolian worlds following us?" Murdat asked. "If we do find a suitable sun they'll try to take it from us and will make terrible enemies."

Julud intervened. "As to the Antolian worlds, they may stop at another sun than the one we settle at, and in any case we'll take things one at a time. It is true that Mithak is impossible as a sun for us, but there still lie Walaz and Vira beyond. One of them may be the sun we seek."

We stared silently for a time toward the sun Mithak. Since leaving Antol our nine worlds had marched steadily on toward Mithak, hoping that the orange sun would prove satisfactory and that our great voyage would end at it. But our hope had ended now that we had almost reached Mithak. For we found that it was surrounded by numberless vast belts and zones of whirling meteors, the only satellites the sun had, a tremendous storm of stone ceaselessly circling it.

To venture our nine worlds into that terrific zone of meteors would be to destroy them almost at once, to turn them into semi-molten condition by the impact of the thousands of great meteoric masses that would strike them in minutes. No, Mithak was not the sun at which our weary worlds could rest. We must go on, to Walaz or Vira. And so worn by the hardships of the voyage through sunless space on our frozen worlds were our peoples that we might not even be able to reach those suns.

Nevertheless, go on we must, as it was impossible to turn back. So at Julud's order, Tolarg turned Pluto away from Mithak and toward Walaz. Walaz was a yellowish-red sun that shone in the heavens as a variable star, regularly increasing and decreasing its brilliance. One by one we turned our worlds after Pluto until all our chain was moving in the direction of Walaz.

I looked back into space along the way

we had come. There I could see by means of our telescopes the four little light-points that were the four worlds of the Antolians, marching on after us, following us. They seemed moving even faster than our worlds, no doubt because they had been fitted with more atom-blasts than ours. Somberly I looked back at them. Even if we did find a sun for our nine worlds, those pursuing planets would seek to share it with us, and we had seen enough of the liquid-bodied Antolians to know that they would make terrible foes and might be able to wrest our own worlds from us.

So our nine worlds moved on toward Walaz, with the Antolians' planets behind and our fate ahead. On a day when we had almost reached Walaz, we looked back and saw that by then the four Antolian worlds had reached Mithak. We watched to see if they would stop at that sun, but they came on past it and after us. No more than we would they destroy their worlds in that cosmic stone-storm around Mithak.

Walaz loomed ahead of us. And almost the last of our resolution fled when we saw its nature. It was a variable star; that we had known. We saw now the reason. Walaz had a dark companion, a dead star as large as itself. The dead star and the yellow-red sun revolved around each other and so the dark one regularly eclipsed the bright one. It meant that this sun was no haven for our planets either. For if our planets circled these two companions, the dark one would constantly be cutting off by its regular eclipses the warmth and light of the bright one. We must go on still farther.

JULUD again gave the order and our planets turned from Walaz and headed toward Vira. Vira, the blue-white sun that shone brightly in the distance, was now our last hope. For beyond it there were no suns for a vast distance. If for any reason Vira was unsuitable, then we were doomed. It might even be that our peoples could not continue existence until Vira was reached, so numbed and weakened were they by the intense cold and darkness of sunless space.

We drove our planets forward toward Vira at the highest possible speed. Forgotten now were the Antolian worlds pursuing us, forgotten everything but the blue-white sun ahead. Our worlds lurched and bucked as we fired blast after blast, urged them on at greater and greater speed. What we found Vira to be would mean life or death for us, and hungrily, tensely, we watched the sun as we sped on toward it.

Behind us at speed even greater than ours, the four Antolian worlds came steadily on our track. They were now drawing near to the sun Walaz. Walaz should be suitable, we thought, for the four Antolian worlds and they would stop there. In any case, we were not thinking now of them but of the sun ahead. Steadily now we were drawing nearer to Vira.

What a cosmic trail we had blazed across the void in our stupendous voyage! Since leaving our own sun, our worlds had touched at four others: at the deadly radio-active sun of Nugat; at Antol, on the brink of explosion, where we had fought its creatures; at Mithak with its awful zones of whirling meteors; and at Walaz with its huge dead companion. And now our worlds were racing on toward a fifth sun at which their fate would be decided, with four worlds of alien beings thundering through the void behind us.

Vira grew larger, larger, as we drew closer. Then when within ten billion miles of it, Hurg of Venus went ahead with a scouting force of ships.

Tensely we waited for Hurg's report, the news that meant life or death. When he returned he gave it at once to us.

"Vira seems entirely satisfactory!" Hurg cried. "It has no harmful radiations or surrounding meteors, and it has no planets! It is a young sun that will warm our worlds for ages!"

"We've won, then!" cried Zintnor of Mars. "We've found a sun at last!"

Julud's face gleamed in the televisor. "Make ready all of you to turn your worlds in around this sun. Tolarg, when we draw nearer you will turn Pluto first into an orbit of four billion miles radius, and Neptune and Uranus and the others will follow in successively closer orbits."

"All ready here on Pluto," Tolarg reported. "But what about those four Antolian worlds following us?"

"They'll not come on to Vira when they see us already settled here—they'll stop at the sun Walaz," said Julud. "The thing for us to do now is to bring our planets safely into orbits around Vira."

An utter tenseness held us as our worlds moved closer to Vira. The great blue-white sun was a stupendous sight, an awesome ball of fire pouring out light and heat that already warmed our nearing worlds.

As we came closer to the sun our tenseness increased. This was the most critical part of the whole vast voyage, we knew. If we made a misstep in bringing our planets into orbits around this sun it would mean that some or all of them would crash into the sun and be destroyed. Every movement of our worlds must be calculated with nicety so that they would follow a safe path in around the sun.

Our column of worlds drew nearer to Vira, passing the sun on one side. Then when a little past it, Pluto turned in around the sun. We saw the planet's side-blasts fire rapidly as Tolarg turned his world, and rapidly Pluto curved in and as it felt the full force of Vira's attraction took up a circular orbit around the sun. Almost at the same time Neptune also turned, taking up an orbit not far inside that of Pluto's.

Rapidly our other planets followed. Murdat and Julud swung Uranus and Saturn without difficulty into correct orbits. But when Wald turned Jupiter it seemed for a moment that disaster lay ahead. Wald had underestimated the force needed to turn his huge planet and had to fire his side-blasts frantically to get it into the proper path. Even so, Jupiter's outer moons barely grazed past Saturn as the great world curved inward.

Mars and Earth followed, cutting in smoothly across the paths of the other planets and taking up orbits closer to the great sun. Hurg was already swinging Venus in inside the path of Earth. And then it was my turn. It was a ticklish job for me to take Mercury in to its orbit, for I had to take my world closer to the glaring blue sun than any of the others. But I manipulated side-blasts and back-blasts until Mercury had glided in and was moving smoothly in an orbit comparatively close to the sun Vira.

A cheer broke from all of us as we saw that on Mercury and on all our worlds the frozen-air blanket was melting into vapor, as our atmospheres thawed. And the snows that had long covered our worlds now were melting too, even those on Pluto and the outer planets. For from great Vira a tremendous outpouring of warmth and light bathed our worlds such as they had not known for many ages.

But into our exultation broke suddenly a sharp cry from Runnal of Earth. In the televisor his face was tense.

"Look back!" he cried. "The four

Antolian worlds are passing the sun Walaz! They're coming on to Vira!"

WE STARED, our triumph frozen. In the telescopes the four Antolian planets were plainly visible, passing Walaz and moving on with mounting speed toward us.

"We must do something!" Hurg cried. "If those Antolian worlds reach this sun and take up orbits around it, it means endless war with them, war that may result in our destruction!"

"We can not stop them from coming on," Julud said sadly. "I had hoped they would stop their worlds at Walaz, but they are coming on."

"If there were only some way to stop them before they get here!" Runnal exclaimed.

An idea seared across my brain. "There *is* a way of stopping them!" I cried. "I can stop them with my world, with Mercury!

"Don't you understand?" I said. "All of Mercury's inhabitants can be transferred to other of our worlds and then I'll take Mercury out and crash it head-on into those four oncoming worlds!"

"Good, and I'll go with you, Lonnat!" cried Hurg.

"And I too!" said Tolarg, eyes gleaming.

Immediately Julud ordered the transfer of Mercury's people to other worlds as I requested. All our worlds' ships swarmed to Mercury and engaged in transporting Mercury's people to the other planets.

It was so tremendous a task that by the time Tolarg and Hurg and I with my assistants in the control-tower were the only people left on Mercury, the four oncoming worlds of the Antolians had almost reached Vira.

Quickly I opened up Mercury's propulsion-blasts and sent the little planet hurtling out from Vira, back along the way we had come toward the four nearing worlds. Tensely I and Tolarg and Hurg held it toward them. Outside the control-tower were our waiting ships.

Toward each other, booming through space with immense speed, thundered Mercury and the four oncoming worlds. The Antolian worlds loomed larger and larger before us. Then they veered to one side.

"They're veering! They're trying to escape the collision!" cried Hurg.

"It'll do them no good!" I exclaimed. I swung Mercury aside in the same direction to meet them.

Again the column of four planets veered as they rushed closer, seeking desperately to escape the oncoming doom. Again I swung Mercury to meet them. Then the foremost of the oncoming Antolian worlds loomed immense in the heavens before our rushing planet.

"They're going to crash!" I cried. *"Up and away before they meet!"*

"Up and away!" yelled Tolarg and Hurg as we threw ourselves from the control-tower into the ships.

Our ships darted up like lightning. The rushing globe of Mercury was almost to the oncoming sphere of the first Antolian world. And then as we shot away from them into space, they met!

There was no sound in the soundless void, but there was a blinding, dazing glare of light that darkened even the great sun behind us for the moment, and then the two worlds became glowing red, molten, blazing with doom! A wave of force struck through space that rocked our fleeing ships.

And behind the first Antolian world the other three of the column came on and crashed into that glowing mass! One by one they crashed and were destroyed; and then the four worlds were one white-

hot mass that veered off into space at right-angles to Vira and away from it. The four colliding worlds had become a new small sun!

I stared after that receding, dazzling mass. There were tears in my eyes as I watched it move away, with the remains of Mercury in it. Mercury, my world, that I had piloted across the great void through the suns only to hurl it at the last into doom.

Hurg was grasping my arm excitedly. "We've won, Lonnat!" he cried. "The Antolians and their worlds destroyed, and Vira ours now for our eight remaining worlds!"

Tolarg held out his hand to me, all mockery gone from his face now. "What you said was right, Lonnat," he said. "It's not the size of a planet that measures its importance. Yours has saved us all."

Slowly I smiled as I grasped his hand. "And you wanted to leave it behind when we started our voyage!" I said. "Well, at last our voyage is ended."

Hurg shook his head, gestured widely from Vira out toward the universe's thronging stars. "Ended for a time only. When Vira dies as our old sun died, we can go on in our worlds to another sun. Sun after sun we can hold, and man and man's power shall not end until the universe itself has ended!"

Remembrance

By MARY C. SHAW

Although I've never glimpsed the Taj Mahal
  Dreaming in starlight on a summer's night,
Whenever gaudy peacocks strut and cry
  That vision flashes out, a wondrous sight!

And though I have not sailed a Chinese junk
  From Canton down a sluggish yellow stream,
The pungent tang of candied ginger brings
  Weird chant of coolies in an Orient dream.

Pillars of marble by a sapphire sea—
  Their crumbling, ancient beauty I've not seen;
Yet all that loveliness comes back to me
  When scented blooms of oleander lean.

Soft thud of camels plodding in the sand
  I've never known, nor tinkling of their bells,
Nor curtained palanquin in purple night
  Swaying like craft upon an ocean's swells.

Whence all this drift and flow of vivid scene
  To quicken long-forgotten sight and sound?
How, where, or when we mortals only guess—
  Slim wraiths of memories once lost, but found.

"The executioner picked from the floor a heavy, carved knife."

The Clenched Hand

By STUART STRAUSS

An unusual story of a bronze fist and the weird train of circumstances surrounding a mysterious murder in a New Orleans artist's studio

"BUT, Cliff, I tell you I saw it: creeping almost on all fours with all hell written on its face—creeping closer and closer like a gray shadow out of the corner. I can't drive it out of my mind. It was a year ago, but so horribly vivid, it might have been last night."

This outburst was Myrna's only greeting as I stepped into her studio. I found her pacing back and forth anxiously awaiting me. I was equally desirous of seeing her. A phone call in a highly strained voice, actually pleading to see me, had sent me almost on the run for her studio on Royale Street.

Myrna Williams and I were old friends, at one time I had fancied we were even more. I had not seen her for nearly a year, and her phone call was the first

knowledge I had that she was even in New Orleans. I was shocked at the change in her: a gay laughing girl had become a white-faced, nervous woman.

Without being asked, I drew a chair before the fire and sat watching her as she walked, twisting a handkerchief between her fingers.

Abruptly she paused before me. "Cliff, I had to tell some one, had to have some one here tonight, at least until after nine —some one to help me hold on to what little sanity I have left.

"You are wondering why I called you. Look here!" Walking hurriedly to a table, she picked up a limp black book, unmistakably a diary, and held it toward me. "See this," said Myrna; "it's Winifred Hudson's diary."

I was startled. The murder of Winifred Hudson, a year ago, had stirred New Orleans, for her reputation as an artist was well known. No one had solved the murder, no one had been tried for the crime. A dead dwarf in Winifred Hudson's studio bore the same strange death markings as did she. The dwarf had been employed as her model: nothing else was known.

"You'll understand why I phoned, why I needed you, after I have read you a part of this diary. It tells things that even I did not know, for I saw only its beginning that afternoon in the shop on Chartres Street and the ending that night in her studio.

"A year ago tonight Winifred came to me, asking me to stay with her. She was terrified, though she made a brave pretense of not believing the story she told me. She took me back to her studio—took me to a horror the memory of which is driving me mad.

"How I escaped the death that came to her at nine that night, I don't know. For me, perhaps death would have been better than what I suffer now."

Then Myrna snapped back the book's heavy silver clasp and began to read:

"*Oct. 22.* I have solved two perplexing problems: I have found both the long-sought ornament for my table and the perfect model as well. The peculiar part is that I found them both in the same place.

"Myrna and I had been just idling about, rather straying from our beaten paths. Between two old houses, both fallen in with age and decay, we saw a little shop with a single dust-encrusted window. As soon as we had peered in, I knew that the long-sought was found. Lying there in the midst of the worst junk imaginable was the cast of a hand done in bronze and clenched into a fist. Age had placed upon it that lovely gray-green patina that only bronze obtains. It was truly a marvelous bit of craftsmanship, almost unholy in its perfection. It was as if it took tremendous strength to keep those long fingers tightly closed. Each vein and tendon stood out rigid in the power of the clasp. There appeared to be a ceaseless, never-ending struggle to unclench the fingers.

"WE OPENED the shop door, and heard in the distance the faint tinkle of a bell. From back in the dingy recesses of the shop limped a little old man so crippled and twisted that he appeared to stand but inches above the floor. His immense head was covered with a shock of white hair and his eyes were a peculiar pale green, bulbous and protruding; eyes that gave me a queer sense of horror and yet at the same time a sense of pity also.

"He made a little, jerking bow and said, 'What is it that madame desires?'

"I noticed that he talked with difficulty,

appearing to open his mouth with effort.

" 'How much is the bronze hand in the window?' I asked.

"I was much surprized at his answer: 'I am sorry, madame, but the hand is not for sale. I have other bronzes and bits of metal work I would be glad to show.'

" 'No,' I replied, 'I am only interested in the hand. Come, name your price.'

"Again he shook his head. 'The hand is not for sale.'

"I suppose that ordinarily I would have left the shop, but instead, to Myrna's amusement, I continued trying to purchase the hand. Somehow I felt I must have it. Even through the shop window the bronze fascinated me in a way that I can hardly explain; a morbid desire to possess such a peculiar sort of ornament.

"I kept raising my price. Suddenly in the midst of my talking, the old man turned his back on me and without a word hobbled into the curtained rear of his shop. I closed his door none too gently as we left."

Myrna ceased to read; she looked at me for a moment before speaking.

"That was the first time I ever saw Henri or the clenched hand," she said. "Henri sounds frightful, doesn't he? That is his picture above the fire—a horrible creature as he appears there, but he looked even more hideous toward the end. The end was one he tried so hard to make her realize."

So far I could see no reason for Myrna reading me these entries, save perhaps to acquaint me with the two characters that were, I was certain, to play the leading rôles in the tragedy that was to leave Myrna with such scars.

She was still for such a long time that I had begun to move restlessly in my chair. With a shrug, as though dismissing unpleasant memories, she once more began to read:

"*Oct. 23.* I had a most unexpected visitor this morning. On answering a knock, I found my old shopkeeper of yesterday standing on the threshold. He appeared to have great trouble with his speech. Almost wordlessly he handed me a paper-wrapped bundle. 'Here is the hand. I will take the price you offered.'

"I was surprized, on taking the package, at its light weight. I would never have thought the hand would weigh so little. Perhaps it was not the same one. Examination proved me wrong, and seeing it before me, I fell more under its spell than ever.

"He had turned to go when an idea seized me. I asked him if he would become my model. After some hesitation, he agreed.

"*Later:* The hand is as I thought, the perfect object for my room. It gives that added note of the sinister for which I had searched.

"*Oct. 30.* It is good to be back at work. I go to bed so tired that I do not feel like writing. Henri, the old man from the shop, is the perfect model. He never tires, and he learns a pose, even to a facial expression, with ease.

"After several false starts I am off on the final idea. I have Henri wrapped in a black cloak. Seated on a small stool, he is staring vacantly at the floor. The whole impression is that of futility and despair. It is all to be in somber shadows with the highlights on his twisted face and gnarled hands.

"*Nov. 6.* Henri is becoming much more friendly. Even though he has increasing difficulty with his speech, he talks a great deal—early days in Paris—New Orleans at a time when Royale Street was brilliant with the lights of gambling-houses and the quadroons at the balls were watched by the white aristocrats—when carriages lined the streets and Ramos

near the old Saint Charles mixed his famous fizzes for the great of all the world.

"*Nov. 11.* Henri, poor chap, is becoming an even more ghastly caricature of a man. The skin upon his face is tensing. His lips are being drawn down at the corners, giving him an evil, leering look. And his eyes have a more terrifying protuberance.

"He is constantly mumbling, apparently to himself, for I can not hear his remarks. He is evidently obsessed by the bronze hand. It seems to me that he can hardly tear his eyes from it. Since he has become so friendly, I have asked him many times how he ever gained possession of such a treasure, but he keeps to a very vague and careful story concerning it—says it has been in his family for countless years and he parted with it only because he needed money desperately.

"*Nov. 19.* My model has been seriously ill. I have been to see him and my worst fears are realized. He lives in a little room behind his shop. The stench of old books, old leather, and general decay is overpowering.

"I have placed Henri in a hospital. While there, I had the tightness of his face and jaws examined. Save that it is caused by an increasing rigidity of the muscles, the doctors could find no reason for such a peculiar malady. However, they said that his present illness was caused by near-starvation. I can not understand this, for I paid him well for the hand and enough as a model to purchase food at least. The doctor tells me that Henri's peculiar ailment of the facial muscles is unique in medical annals.

"*Nov. 20.* I had a queer experience today. I was making a plaster cast of the bronze hand. As I picked it up, I thought I noticed that the clenching of the fist did not appear as tense as usual, but of course my imagination, which often runs away, is up to its usual tricks.

"*Nov. 23.* Henri is now out of the hospital and ready to work, so I am beginning a new picture. This time, instead of using somber browns and blacks, I have chosen flame-red as my color motif. Henri, nude to the waist, with a red turban and blue breech-clout, bears on a silver salver a hand severed at the wrist. For this I am using my precious bit of bronze. For some reason Henri appears to be afraid of the cast and is reluctant even to touch it."

MYRNA paused in her reading and looked up at the picture above the fire. "And," she said, "she never finished it. I found it among her things when I returned. I did not know until then that she had left everything to me. I wonder if it would have been a better picture if she had ever placed on it the finishing touches she had planned. I hate the thing. I don't know what caused me to hang it. Perhaps we will burn it later tonight. But now I want to continue with the diary:

"*Nov. 24.* I have examined the bronze hand closely. Its lack of weight still mystifies me. At first I thought it must be a hollow shell, but when I strike it sharply there is no bell-like sound; so it must be a solid piece.

"*Nov. 29.* I am glad to be home. I find that I miss all that is here even after a few days' absence. Henri, whom I left in charge, has kept the place spotless, and he seemed pathetically glad to see me. I imagine he thinks I have adopted him permanently.

"*Nov. 30.* Upon my return I find that the hand is more of a puzzle than ever. I wrote, I think, that when I first purchased the hand I was struck by the rigidity of the pose, how all the veins and

muscles stood out in high relief. Now I am positive—unless my eyes are deceiving me—there is almost a smoothness of the surface. The intense strain of the clasp looks greatly lessened. Of course, this is either from poor eyes or a too vivid imagination.

"*Dec. 1.* Since I have been gone, even in such a short time, Henri's appearance has become more terrifying. Myrna seems afraid of him and avoids him whenever she can. I do not blame her, for he is certainly repugnant to look at. The skin on his face has tightened further and he is beginning to lose his shock of white hair. However, I need him, and his devotion knows no end. He will stand motionless for as long as I wish, holding the tray on which rests the bronze hand. More and more am I convinced that it has some secret significance to him. His utterly unconscious expression of horror is perfect for my picture. I am, I think, cruel to him, but I drive myself just as hard.

"*Dec. 4.* All day I have been pursued by thoughts of what occurred last night. Sometime during the night or early morning, I was awakened by a veritable pandemonium breaking out in my living-room. I heard a chair overturn with a crash, and afterward a sort of dragging, bumping sound; then the noise ended as suddenly as it had started, with an even louder crash. I lay shivering in the dark, picturing hold-up men, cutthroats, and other sorts of undesirables. But as the noise did not continue, I managed somehow, on shaking legs, to reach the living-room and turn on the lights.

"The place was in confusion. Chairs were overturned, a table pushed from its usual place; one pane in the skylight was broken and the glass was scattered over the floor. I can not imagine why any one who would break in would make such a racket. In all my reading, thieves were noted for their ability to enter a place quietly.

"When Henri came this morning, I told him about last night's affair. Never have I seen any one show such stark terror. All day long he has mumbled and muttered to himself, but I can get nothing out of him. Why, I wonder, is he so terrified?

"*Dec. 4.* The same nerve-racking noises have continued for the last two nights. First the bumping and thumping, followed by the crash of overturned furniture, and then the usual silence. But last night some one must have tried to take my bronze fist, for I found it the next morning on a chair across the room from its usual place on my table.

"*Dec. 5.* I have had to change my picture again, for Henri has become so horrible that he is even a better study than formerly. He is now entirely bald, and his face is like that of some old mummy, save for his bulging eyes. I think for some reason he is living in a daze of constant fear, but I am unable to learn why. He has lost all his old friendliness and daily grows more and more uncommunicative. Only his eyes seem alive, and they follow my every movement. I would get rid of the man were it not that I still have need of him.

"*Dec. 7.* There were no noises last night; so I imagine whoever the prowler was must have become disappointed in his search for valuables. However, here is a possible explanation for the sudden ceasing of the noises. Opening my front door early this morning, I found Henri asleep across the sill. He merely shook his head when I pressed him for an explanation.

"*Dec. 12.* Yesterday I told Henri I would have no use for him for a while, but this morning I found him as usual

on my doorstep. The man's condition is pitiful. He is so agitated that he can hardly walk. He spoke this morning for the first time in over a week. It was dreadful to see the difficulty he had in articulation.

"He begged—no, *pleaded* is the better word—for the bronze fist. He even became threatening.

" 'You are in danger, madame,' he said, 'grave danger. Do please give me back the hand. You must!'

"I questioned him at once as to what danger my refusal might bring, but he would not answer save to mumble about danger, death, and the fingers of de Reville or the devil or some such name. What I can not understand is why, once having parted with the bronze, he is so anxious to get it back. Undoubtedly he has had some dazzling offer for it. Knowing how I prize it, he is merely trying to frighten me into giving it to him.

"Just as soon as my work is finished, I must get rid of the man. He is becoming an obsession with me. I pity him, and yet he frightens me. He is, I am sure, actually shrinking in size every day.

"*Dec. 13.* Today Henri tried to steal my bronze cast. I caught him hiding it beneath his coat just as he was ready to leave. He made no explanatory excuses, but, placing the hand back on the table, dragged himself from the room. I would never have thought he would steal. There must indeed be some pressing reason for his desire to regain the thing.

"To me the bronze hand has a sinister fascination. I find myself watching it every time I am in the room. I am afraid to admit it, but I think the hand is changing shape. But this is madness, for it is only a thing of metal—a bronze cast. Madness or not, to me the fingers of the fist seem now only lightly closed.

"*Dec. 14.* I am not mad! The hand has changed shape! But how? and why? To a chance visit from Myrna I owe my sanity. While here she was examining the hand. Suddenly she picked it up and turned to me.

" 'Where is the old hand and where did you get this companion piece?'

" 'How do you know it is not the same?' I asked.

" 'Well, see here,' she replied, 'there is not the same tenseness of the muscles; the fingers are only loosely closed. Did you get this from Henri? I had no idea that he had two.'

"I did not disillusion her, for there was no reason for alarming her with such an unexplainable and fantastic occurrence. I changed the subject to other matters. But I know now that there is nothing wrong with either my imagination or my eyes."

MYRNA looked up from the diary. "If only she had told me, then I might have helped her. I noticed at the time that she seemed reluctant to discuss what I supposed was a new purchase. But I put it down to any other cause than the real one. I hated that hand, Cliff, from the very first! It was cold and cruel and like no honest metal I had ever touched. However, it was beautifully done and fascinating even to me, for all its horror. I think I can understand in a way why Win would never, not understanding his reason, give it to Henri. Oh, if she had only believed his story a little earlier!"

I sat back in my chair. I sensed fully that some fear had hung over Winifred Hudson, something that the woman had felt herself. She must have been brave but stubborn to have kept the hand. Or again, she was perhaps unable to escape the thing that waited for her. My musings were cut short as Myrna once more began her reading:

"*Dec. 17.* The noises in my living-room have started once more—the same noise of overturned furniture accompanied by the extraordinary scraping, shuffling noise I always hear. As usual, nothing was taken, and, save for furniture, nothing disturbed. I have locked the hand away in a closet, to which I alone have the key.

"More than ever I believe that it is Henri, trying by these disturbances to frighten me into giving up the bronze. Thank heaven, in a few days, if all goes well, I will finish with the picture and Henri at the same time. The man continues to terrify me. His voice is now almost completely gone, and in place of speaking, he croaks like some ancient frog. The skin on his face has cracked under the strain of tightening flesh and now is covered by tiny red lines that slowly seep blood.

"He does nothing but beg for the hand and is constantly croaking of danger, grave danger, and death that is threatening me. But of course he will not tell me from where or from whom this will come. I accused him of making the noises in the night. He denied this vehemently. But he must be the author of these nocturnal disturbances.

"*Dec. 23.* A strange thing has happened to me. Last night I had a most frightful dream. Everything was in darkness. I could see or hear nothing. Then suddenly a hand grabbed my throat. It was cold and clammy, but oh, so strong! It must have been huge, for I sensed the fingers almost meeting around my neck. The pressure was gradually increased until my breath came in short gulping sobs. I was just losing consciousness in the dream when I awoke, screaming with fright.

"All day today my throat has been sore, though I can find no signs of inflammation. I suppose that my awakening screams must have strained it.

"For some reason, perhaps because he was watching me so intently, I told Henri of my dream. He was so terrified that for a moment I thought he was going to faint. I can not understand why he should be so frightened. If I were not sure the whole episode was a dream, I would think he had a guilty conscience. Somehow he gained control of himself, but made no comment on either his action or my dream. On his departure he again begged me to give him the hand.

"*Dec. 24.* The same dream again last night, and this mornng I am croaking almost as badly as Henri. In addition to my hoarseness, there are several red welts like finger prints on my neck. I know that it was a dream, but I can not explain this strange disfigurement. It is impossible for me to work. I simply can not paint while in this condition.

"Henri, this picture, and all the strange things that have happened are turning me into a nervous wreck. I wonder why I do not destroy the canvas, give the bronze hand to Henri, and forget the whole matter. But stubbornness and a sense of hating to give way to pressure make me go on.

"THIS is Christmas Eve. Never before have I had so little holiday spirit. However, Myrna is giving a party. I must go or she will be hurt. I have seen so little of her lately. I have felt so bad that I have seen no one save Henri. If things get worse, I must talk to Myrna. She, I know, can help, or at least advise me.

"*Dec. 26.* Today Henri again threatened me with death and disaster, but was again refused the bronze, and without another word he shuffled away. When he had gone, I unlocked the closet in

which I have secreted the hand. At what I saw, I was horror-stricken. I can scarcely write about it even now. The hand was lying palm up, the fingers almost open; for I could see the palm clearly and the fingers almost to the tips. They were like huge, clutching talons. On the palm was burned some design, just what, I could not tell, but a brand of some sort undoubtedly.

"*Dec. 27.* Henri this morning without a word handed me a curious document. At first I thought it old and yellowed paper, but on closer inspection I found it parchment. This document was written in an ancient French, of which, fortunately, I have more than a passable knowledge. It was one of those long-winded legal papers, so I will not try to set it down verbatim. The parchment was dated December 30, 1531, and was addressed to the governor of His Majesty's prison in Paris. It informed that dignitary that at nine o'clock of that night he must put to death by torture one Armand de Reville, and before doing so, must strike off his right hand, on which is branded the fleur-de-lis. Then came a listing of the man's crimes, and these were set down at length, being treason, sorcery, witchcraft, and the strangling of some seven women.

"Watching me closely, as soon as I had finished this curious order, Henri handed me another sheet of parchment. This, a letter, was dated the same as the one I had just read and bore the signature of Armand de Reville. However, the penmanship was so poor and the writing so blurred by time that I could not read it. I shook my head and handed it back to Henri. At once, in his horrible croak, he began to read. No, read is not the word, for he did not look at the writing. Evidently he had memorized the bit of parchment:

"*'I, Armand de Reville, Compte de Banrebas, Sieur des Isles de la Mer, who am about to die, write this to my heirs, living, and to those who will come in the future. It has been decreed that my hand, which has clasped that of the Prince of Darkness, is to be stricken off. Now I, your father, who has sat beside the Evil One himself, command you. Arrangements have been made so that this proud hand of mine will be returned to you. First to Raoul de Reville, my eldest son, and then from son to son for time to come.*

"*'As long as it is in the possession of a de Reville, all will be well. But should it become the property of another, wo betide him who loses the hand and wo betide whoever shall own it. And after four centuries from this day, at nine o' night, I shall return to claim mine own. For four centuries must I make payment for my deeds. But afterward my Master has work for me to do.'*

"Henri ceased his reading.

"'Explain all this gibberish,' I said. 'Don't try to frighten me with curses four centuries old.'

"Croaking and mumbling, he made answer: 'This Armand was a bad, wicked man, but an ancester of mine. He was a demon, a sorcerer, a devil, a fiend on earth. He was a man of noble blood, but he held communion with evil things. Powerful he was, at a court that did not mind wickedness, but in a fit of rage he strangled the king's favorite and paid for his anger with his life.

"'For all these centuries my family has kept the pledge and his hand, waiting, waiting for him to return and claim it. Once we were rich, proud, and haughty; now I am the last of my family.

"'I did not intend to sell the hand when I placed it in the window to attract people into my little shop. But when you were willing to pay the price,

I, being desperate for money, parted with it. Since then I have tried to regain it many times—by fright, by threats, even by stealing, by offering you all I had; for you have been most kind, and I want no harm to come to you. For myself, I care little, for in a short time I shall die anyway.

" 'Bring out the bronze hand. You, too, can see that the coming is close. Already the hand has lost it death grip, ready to be put in place. Please, please give me back that devil's fist, or evil will befall us both.'

"*Later:* Of course I refused, and now Henri is gone. The man certainly is a wonderful actor. For some reason he wants the bronze and went to all this rigmarole to obtain it. However, I am puzzled; the documents certainly have the appearance of genuineness, and in truth the hand has changed in contour. Now, as I look at it, the brand is clearly discernible. It is a dark but glowing red against the deep brown of the bronze. I see that I can still say bronze. Should I echo Henri and talk of long-dead flesh? No! Flesh it can not be. It is metal! Bronze. I must keep repeating that to myself. Bronze. Bronze. Bronze. But I can not explain to myself these devilish occurrences. I must force myself not to think of flesh and cursing ghosts in connection with my cast. It is bronze, I say, an insensate piece of metal made by some craftsman with a great but diabolic genius.

"I wish I were able to talk this over with Myrna. She might advise me what course to take. But such a consultation is impossible. I do not want her to think me a silly woman frightened by a cripple's scheming mad-brained fairy-tales.

"*Dec. 28.* I covered several pages yesterday but I wanted to set down in their entirety all the strange things that happened that day. They still continue to haunt me. Last night I had the most terrible dream of all the many that I have had:

"I WAS standing in a huge room, dimly lit by smoking torches. Somehow it seemed far underground. The room was carved from solid rock. Huge pillars of rough granite towered above me, from which hung rusty iron chains, and queer cross-shaped bars were studded into each post. Around the gray stone walls were other chains, and stacked in corners were piles of knives and pincers. In one corner a fireplace threw out the only heat, and over this a huge spit slowly turned. At one side of the fireplace was a wooden frame that to my eyes looked like a crude bedstead with ropes running from rings at head and foot to a windlass near by. But this I knew was the rack on which victims were torn limb from limb.

"Still nearer the fire was a wooden block some two feet high, dyed a dark red. Standing beside it was the lone figure in this room of horrors, a man naked to the waist, but whose head and shoulders were covered by a black hood. He was motionless, leaning on a great double-bladed ax. Spread on the floor about him were knives with heavy blades, a big pair of shears, and many curious instruments of which I knew nothing.

"Breaking a silence that made me wish to scream, a door clanged hollowly somewhere far above me. Then down a flight of steep steps, lighting their way with flaming torches, appeared a group of men, four of whom were dragging a prisoner loaded down with chains. As I watched, I was struck by something familiar about this man, something vaguely and dimly familiar about the shuffling walk, the twisted body, and the mummy-like bald head. I looked again. It was Henri!

"The executioner picked from the floor a heavy curved knife. The two guards lifted the prisoner's arm, and, despite his struggles, held it in a rigid grip. I could hear the swish of the steel as the headsman swung his knife, and then I awoke.

"*Dec. 29.* Today Henri came to me with a most astounding proposal. It is that I marry him. He wants, so he swears, only to save me from danger. After the time of awaiting was past he would go away, never to return. If we were married, the hand would still be in the family and old Armand de Reville's curse and vengeance could not then affect us.

"Ordinarily I would have been amused. But so much has happened to me that I am afraid I have lost my sense of humor.

"After I had thanked him and declined, he would not go, but merely sat staring at the wall with a hopeless expression. For the first time I am forced to think he actually believes in the ancient curse of his ancestor. Beyond any doubt his disease has driven him mad.

"Tomorrow is the time appointed; at nine o'clock tomorrow night I shall know that either Henri is a liar and insane or—cheerful thought!—I shall be dead. Henri assured me of the certainty of this latter fact only a short time ago.

"*Dec. 30.* This is the fatal night, the time for the solving of the mystery. Myrna is with me, for after all, I could not stand to face it alone. I went to her studio about an hour ago and poured out to her the whole story in all its ghastly detail. I only wish now that I had confided in her earlier. She agreed to stay with me and suggested that we bring some man, both as an added witness and as protection if Henri's mania should become dangerous. This I refused. I want no other witness to my foolishness.

"In front of me as I write lies the hand, now absolutely open. No matter how much I desire to do so, I can not disbelieve my own eyes, but I am certain even now that there must be some logical and reasonable meaning in this. None the less, the hand is open, lying palm down, and the fingers appear to be tapping with impatience on the table. Near it stands a clock ticking off the minutes. Hand and clock—clock and hand—I find myself glancing first at one and then at the other. The clock ticks silently away, and the hand, to my ears, taps a devil's tattoo on the thin wood of the table.

"Now it is five minutes to nine. Henri, seated near me, mumbles, 'Five minutes to live, five minutes to live.'

"I will not let myself become too frightened, even though my feet are like ice and I have to exert all my will to keep my hands from shaking.

"Henri is pacing the floor like some caged animal. He has ceased to plead for the hand, and he, too, is waiting. The stillness, broken only by the tick of the clock and the soft pad-pad of Henri's footfalls, is deathly. There is something awesome, something savage, in this death watch.

"I wish Myrna would speak, but she only watches me as I write. I think she, too, almost believes.

"I am saying to myself that nothing will happen, nothing *can* happen. But I am fast losing control of my nerves.

"The minute indicator of the clock is almost at nine. From somewhere far away a clock booms out: one—a pause; two—a pause; three—another pause; and so on up until the ninth stroke. Nine o'clock has come; in but a moment it will be past and I shall be released for ever from this dread fear.

"Henri gives a croaking cry and points into a distant corner. I am afraid to look, but I must. What is it? A shadow from the lamp?—No! no!—it is taking shape

—a gray formless thing. It becomes—oh God, let me write this down!—a man—a little, gray old man, who waggles a handless stump before him. As he crawls toward us, Henri slithers to meet him. They join in the center of the room. I can not see—yes! yes! Oh! Henri is being——"

MYRNA'S voice trailed off into silence at that last broken and unfinished sentence. It was all terribly real to me as she finished. This woman sitting beside me here in this quiet room before the cheerful fire had seen it all; no, not all, but only the last dreadful scene. It was no wonder that she had aged and that there were lines bitten deep into her once lovely face. I was brought back to the present by Myrna's next remark.

"Do you wonder now, Cliff, that I am afraid I am really crazed?—as mad as poor Winifred thought herself? There we sat and watched Henri struggling with that other so like himself that it might have been a man struggling with his reflection in a dim mirror—saw the thing grasp Henri's throat with its one hand, lift him clear of the floor and then throw him like a broken, grotesque doll into a corner; saw him then come creeping on, creeping toward the two of us, sitting there paralyzed by terror. I wanted to scream but could not make a sound.

"Closer and closer he came, as silently and as gray as drifting smoke, yet somehow firm-bodied and very evil. Even now I can remember the smell of him that permeated the whole room, as if we had been too long shut away from warmth and sunlight. Now he was nearer, almost to the table, and yet I could not scream. Winifred, across the table, looking—no, I can't talk about that—I don't even want to think about that look!

"Then I saw a claw reach across the table and take the hand. This man, if man is what I can call the thing, stood there beside us and stretched, now, *two* hands out toward Winifred and began to sidle closer to her. He was smiling a beastly, triumphant, slimy smile. Inch by inch, inch by inch, he dragged himself toward her. She never moved to avoid him—never lost that frozen look as she watched him with those powerful twisted arms and the two hands with writhing fingers. I saw him, Cliff, grasp her by the throat! Then I fainted.

"What happened afterward has never been quite clear. I have only one vivid memory amid a whirl of gray impressions—a memory vivid only because——"

Here Myrna hesitated for a moment. "No, I'll tell you about that shortly. I remember being lifted from my chair, of a burning sensation on my arm, a memory of an evil, chuckling laugh close to my ear. The pain in my arm increased so that I wanted to scream, but I could not make a sound. I had the impression of stairs and the night wind cold in the courtyard; next, the opening of a door; then more pain as I was thrown on the floor; and from a distance again that evil laugh.

"I must have struck my head as I fell, for later I found myself lying next this fireplace near one of the andirons. Near me on the floor was this book.

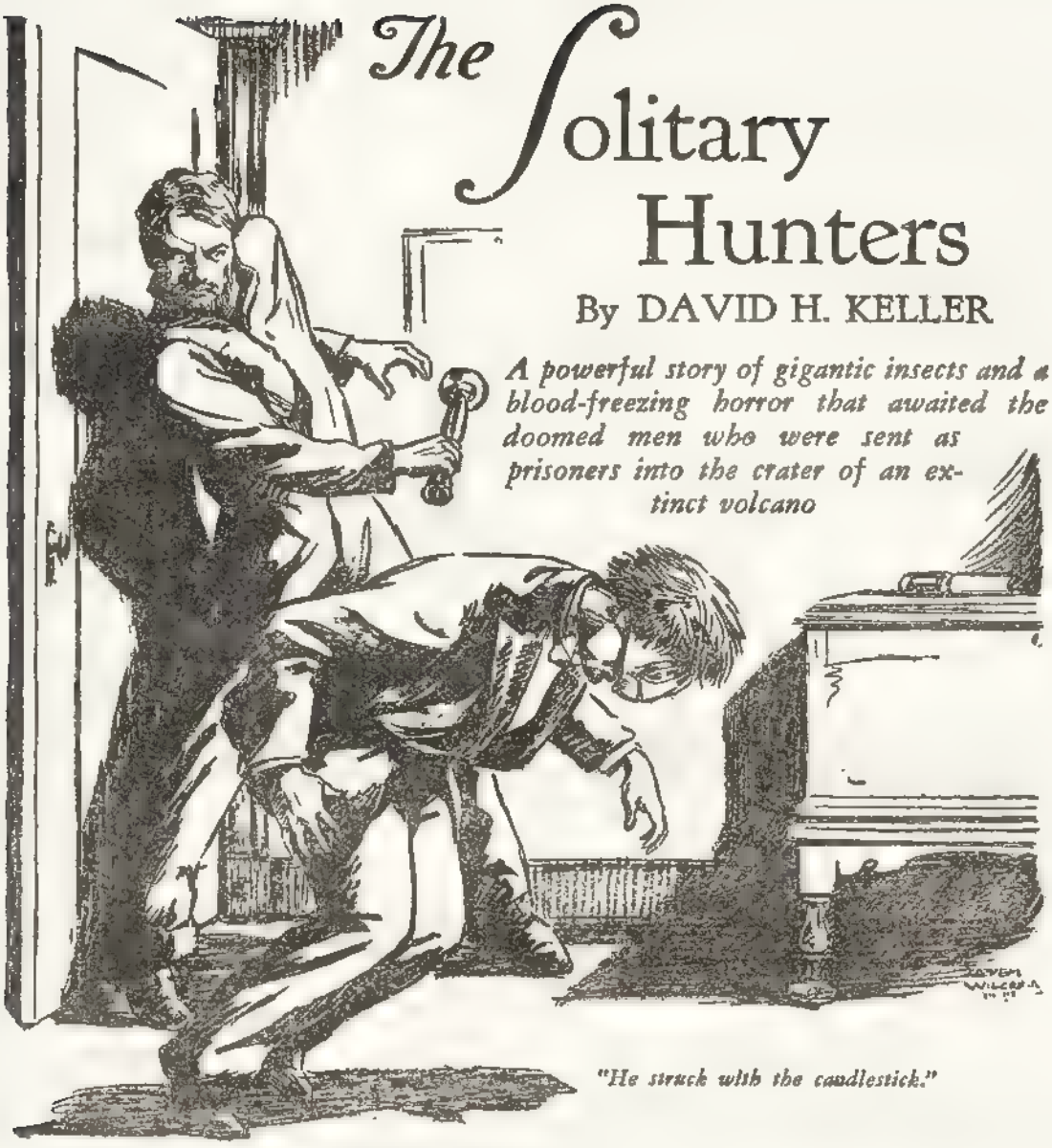
"My arm was burned so badly that at first I was afraid I had been thrown on a live coal. Oh, if it had only been that!—but it wasn't. Look! See this, and then can you wonder if sometimes I think that madness awaits me?"

She pulled up one of the sleeves of her dress. About her arm, above the elbow, was etched the fiery print of a hand, each finger distinct, and in the center in a deeper tone was the clear-cut impression of a fleur-de-lis!

The Solitary Hunters

By DAVID H. KELLER

A powerful story of gigantic insects and a blood-freezing horror that awaited the doomed men who were sent as prisoners into the crater of an extinct volcano



"He struck with the candlestick."

The Story Thus Far

PROFESSOR KINGSTON, a young entomologist, answers an advertisement and is offered employment by Serpolis, leader of the underworld. The gangster arouses the young man's interest in his offer by showing him airplane pictures of Rose Crater. When, in addition, he is told that Serpolis' daughter is a prisoner in the crater, he determines to go there at any cost.

In Washington, Kingston is told that Rose Crater is a Federal prison, started in an effort to stop crime in the United States. It is owned and managed by a private citizen, who offers it free, provided that there is no Federal inspection of his methods. Every year one thousand convicts are sent there for life imprisonment.

Kingston goes to London and discusses the pictures with the famous scientist, Spartins. This man doubts the truth of

This story began in WEIRD TALES for January

the pictures but gives the younger man valuable advice, which later is shown to be necessary to a safe exploration of the crater.

Kingston changes his name to Prince, returns to New York and is convicted of the murder of a state judge.

The next April he is one of the one thousand prisoners selected to enter the crater. He meets a Yale graduate named King, and they lead the convicts through a one-way tunnel into Rose Crater. Here they are astonished to find a big house on one side of the crater, long rows of barrels, empty, but with dried Louisiana sirup on their sides, many hundreds of small huts, but not a trace of the prisoners sent to the prison in former years. The prisoners are told to live in the huts, but their only restraint is the unclimbable sides of the old volcanic crater.

Not having any work, the convicts amuse themselves by sadistic murders. King, sickened by their devilish sports, demands that they behave themselves, and by his tremendous strength shows them that he is entitled to be called their King.

Soon after this the barrels begin to fill with Louisiana sirup and to these barrels come twelve-foot hornets who prove to be the males of a gigantic form. In a few days the females appear, and after mating, begin to dig tunnels for their eggs. The convicts are forced to leave their huts to obtain their daily supply of food and are caught by the females and carried to their tunnels to serve as food to the young insects. The males die, but the females rapidly deplete the human population of the crater.

King and Prince hold a conference and decide on a dual effort to solve the mystery of the big house. King determines to go there while Prince remains to make a further study of the new form of insect life.

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16. One by One They Go

FROM that time on life was just one shrieking disappearance after another. King left the hut the evening of his announcement. As he did not come back I had my choice of ideas as to his fate. Poisoned in a tunnel or killed in the big house. Hardly a prisoner, for Hamford James had no place in his program for prisoners, unless they were exceptional in type, like Happy.

It was lonely without the King. I regretted that I had not protested more decidedly against his leaving me. Our little army was divided and it was small enough as it was.

Day after day the convicts became hungrier, more desperate, increasingly willing to take any kind of chances, if only they could obtain food. The solitary hunters became more numerous up to a certain number, perhaps fifty, and then no more were added to their ranks. Perhaps the first out had laid their quota of eggs and died. But there were enough left to work havoc with the rapidly diminishing group of miserable prisoners.

We suffered. Any way we tried we suffered. To make a dash for food was mental agony. No matter how clever we were, there were always some who were too slow, too clumsy, and these were carried, shrieking, to the tunnels. Some of the convicts tried starving, simply locked the door of their huts and starved, but even they, when the hunger became too acute, yielded to the universal desire to save life at whatever cost and made a dash for the food, which continued to come up fresh every day. The whistle, the dash for the food, the dash of the hunters for the men, the dash back of

those who had escaped, and then more long hours of hunger.

I do not know how I escaped as long as I did.

But every day was suspense and every night misery from hunger.

So one day I protected my neck and spine as best I could with the catalogues, even adding two books for good measure, and I deliberately walked out to the food platform, ate all I could and then started to go across the crater to the sand-hills. Not many hunters were now in the air, but one saw me and came for me. I didn't run, just waited for her to pick me up with her claws, and then, securely held, I was carried to her tunnel.

In front of her tunnel she placed me on the ground, turned around, and, evidently satisfied that she had selected the right place, plunged her poison needle into my neck. King was right in his thought that one of those twenty-foot monsters might bore through a battleship, but the thousands of pages of paper book were some protection to me. I owe my life to the mail order catalogues, or, perhaps, the copy of Fabre or the Bible. At least, my captor thought she had thrust the needle far enough, simply went through the skin, injected the poison, much of which must have run over the skin instead of under, and then started to drag me into her burrow.

Startled to find that I really was alive, though the little poison that had entered the wound was giving me first a sense of great pain and then a decided numbness, I had presence of mind enough to pretend to be paralyzed. Through the long tunnel the wasp dragged me and then into a side chamber, where she laid me on the ground and deposited an egg on top of me. Then she went out into the main tunnel, put some dirt in to shut the opening, and left me. I could hear her closing the hole, and, reaching up, could feel the egg on my breast.

I knew that it would take three or four days for this egg to hatch, and that, during that time, there was no particular danger. Secure in this thought, I went to sleep. Of course, it was really the poison in me that caused me to lose consciousness.

The little old man in London and I had worked it out with what seemed to be mathematical accuracy. From the time I left him to the day of my arrest I had taken anti-venom serum in increasing doses in order to give me complete protection against any amount of poison that a fifteen-foot wasp would inject into me. To his advice I also owe my life; but there is no doubt that the wasp was fooled by the books I had bound on my neck and spine. She went in so far, and my quietness satisfied her that her work had been adequate.

IN SPITE of myself I slept, how long I do not know, but I was awakened by a sharp pain in my chest. Feeling there, I found that the grub had hatched and, with its mouth against my skin, was pouring out drops of an acrid liquid, strong enough to dissolve the skin and give it a place to fasten its conical mouth so that it could start in to suck my juices. Not till it is half-grown does it really begin eating its food by chewing.

There is a nasty, star-shaped scar on my chest, which will always remain there as a souvenir of the hour when I nearly became the food of a grub. The pain, the resentment, the hunger of my long fast turned me from a normal human entomologist to a wild animal. What? Was a little grub eighteen inches long presuming to eat me, a Princeton graduate? Never! Men ate worms and grasshoppers and snails as fancy delicacies;

very well, here was a man who was going to eat the grub of a *Sphecius*.

Tearing the dripping mouth from my chest, I closed it with one hand, pulled the grub toward me with the other and started to eat. It wasn't bad. At least it was food, rather like lobster. I ate till I was no longer hungry, threw the dead carcass from me, and then, secure in the thought that the worst was over, and that I had nothing to fear at present, I went to sleep—to dream of a world where human life was threatened by swarms of giant wasps, where the cities were depopulated and existence consisted of long periods of preparation for battle and then two months of titanic struggle in an effort to escape the solitary hunters whose only thought was to obtain enough human bodies to feed the next generation of *Sphecius*.

I awoke, screaming, and stiff all over. The puncture in my back was ulcerated, the books, bound to my spine, had kept me from lying in a comfortable position, and the ulcer on my chest was far from pleasing in its reactions.

Sitting up, I tried to recall the past events. Perhaps it was pride, perhaps just a foreboding, but the thought came to me that I was the only convict alive, the rest being just skin and bones, forming, it might be, a part of the nest of larvæ.

Anyway, last man or not, I had to get out of that chamber; so I felt around till I came to the place of the loose dirt, pawed a way through it and crawled out into the main tunnel. There I lost all sense of direction and walked on till I came to a blind end. Reversing my way, and keeping a hand on the side of the wall, I at last had the pleasure of seeing daylight, and, staggering out into the open, I sat down on the soft sand and tried to think of what should be done next.

There came to my ears the put-put-put of a gas engine. Some hundreds of yards away I saw a tractor, with the bodies of several wasps trailing behind.

The harvest was over, the seed planted for the next generation of giant wasps, and now they were cleaning up Rose Crater to prepare for the next April first and the new crop of convicts.

"No wonder they call it April Fool's Day," I laughed hysterically.

17. I Hold an Ace

SATISFIED that I was right in the thought that I was the only convict alive, it suddenly occurred to me that I held a very valuable ace in this game of cards I was playing with Hamford James.

From the time the thousand convicts entered Rose Crater he would exercise every precaution to see that nothing was neglected in the way of complete protection to the big house and its occupants. But, once satisfied that the convicts were all dead, that caution would relax; he would probably cut down his list of employees and spend the rest of the year in semi-relaxation and study.

In other words, I felt that when the time came there would be no difficulty in entering the big house.

The thought gave me confidence.

I tried to imagine how I looked. Not shaved since the last of March, my overalls torn and worse than dirty. The juice of the worm gluing my beard into tangled masses, and ulcers on my back and chest. A pretty sight! It certainly required some grandiose sensation to feel that such a man had the multimillionaire entomologist and owner of Rose Crater in his grip.

And it did make me grandiose. Of all the thousands of men who had entered the prison, I was the only one who had survived.

On the next trip the tractor came near-

er to me; so I slipped back into the tunnel. No use being caught now.

Night came. I was hungry. It was too far and perhaps too dangerous to go to the nearest barrel of cane sirup, and perhaps it was dry by this time. Well, I knew where food was. Not nice food, but better than none. Feeling my way down the tunnel, I stopped at the first soft spot in the wall and tore through the dirt into a side chamber. I went in on my hands and knees, feeling my way and not very much pleased at what I found, bones and dry pieces of skin and a rather offensive odor of putrefaction. But the grub had made a good job of the man. There was practically nothing left except the skeleton.

Beyond this skeleton I found the cocoon. An oblong cylindrical structure, broader at one end than the other and shaped rather like the cone of the white pine, the walls were smoothly stuccoed of pieces of sand cemented together. Around the middle were the thirteen turret-like projections which served as air-holes. Ah! I thought, an unlucky number for this larva.

I tried to break the wall, but it was solid. At last I found a stone, and by repeated pounding I broke through. The larva was there and in a very healthy condition. With finger nails that were more like the talons of a bird than a collegian, I tore off pieces and gorged on them. More lobster meat, I assured myself. At least, there was one *Sphecius* who would never reach maturity.

That night I ventured over to a sugar barrel, found a little at the bottom, rubbed my hand in it and licked the sugar off. Tasted good. Anything tasted good at that time. Satisfying my need for sugar, I felt my way into a hut, eased my aching body on a cot and went to sleep.

It was broad daylight when I awoke, with a sense of uneasiness. I heard voices. Was an inspection being made of the huts? If that was the case, I was trapped. Rolling over on the floor, I crawled under the cot and pulled the covers down over the front.

The voices grew louder. Just two of them. One undoubtedly a man's and the other softer, higher-pitched and tending to the feminine.

"In a way," the man's voice said, "this has been our most satisfactory season. There is no doubt that our solitary hunters had absolutely no fear of man. Of course, there was no resistance offered, but even so I feel that they are forming a very satisfactory behavior pattern which will enable them to continue on their same line of conduct, irrespective of any defense humanity may offer."

The other voice answered. It was cool, pleasing, and fearless,

"I still have confidence in the human race to survive."

"All right. Let's humor the little lady in her pet idea. But let me tell you that when I transplant these cocoons to the Desert of Gobi and let them propagate for a few years on Tartar meat, your idea of human supremacy will be put to a severe test."

"Oh! Why argue with you? You know you are right and I know you are wrong, so why argue?" There was a slight petulant resistance in the voice.

"Anyway, the season was very successful. Milford tells me that the crater will be clean in another day, and then we will go back to our usual life in the laboratory."

"Are you going to send Milford and the rest of the help away?"

"Yes. I would rather be alone. With you here to cook for me and read to me when I am tired, life is not half bad."

"I should think you would be afraid of two things."

"Just two?"

"Yes, just two. What is there to prevent Milford and your Swedes from telling tales about you during their vacation? And what is there to prevent your being killed—by your cook?"

"You make me laugh. Milford and his six men are absolutely true to me and you ought to know it. They can go away tomorrow and spend their wages all over the earth, but they will keep their mouths shut and return on the first of March as usual. As for you, I know you have every reason to hate me, but you don't, and you are too much of a lady to kill me."

"It would be hard to do, but I would be glad to see some one else do it. At least, I am glad it is over for another year. I suppose you will take off that ridiculous disguise, and look like a human being again. It is one of those things that makes me doubt your sanity."

"I am going to do it. Suppose we go back to the house. I want to have a final conference with Milford tonight, and tomorrow early they will leave through the southwest passage. I am rather glad the experiment is over for another year. Perhaps you will be kinder to an old man."

"How can I be kind to you? With the cries of those thousands of poor men ringing in my ears! Were you kind to them?"

"Certainly. It was the best thing that could happen to them."

The voices died away. I cautiously crawled to the side of the hut and looked out through the transparent wall. My surmise was right. One of the speakers was a woman!

"Hamford James and Joan Serpolis," I whispered. "She is alive, and well, and he is sending his men out tomorrow. A disguise. I wonder what it is? There is one thing I must do and that is go to the big house tonight. No use waiting. Tonight or never."

Joan alive! Of course, I might be wrong. But there was a chance I was right, and that chance acted on me like a stimulant.

Yet my jubilant mood was tempered sadly by thoughts of King. Was he alive or dead? What had happened to him since he went down the food-shaft? And if it really was true that his sister was alive, did he know it? Or did he die in ignorance of it?

I waited till dusk and then I tracked across the crater as fast as I could toward the big house. It was gayly illuminated now, in striking contrast to its somber darkness during the weeks of the experiment. It was very silly of me, but I forgot the danger-line and the five dead men on the sand. I just went right up to the house, trying however to keep in the shadows.

18. I Enjoy a Bath

LOOKING in through the windows I could see two people dining in solitary splendor, with butler and everything. The other side of the first floor could easily be identified as a library. No doubt some of the rooms on the second floor served as bedrooms. In all, it could not have been much more than a fourteen-room house. I concluded that the servants occupied rooms in the basement. My plan was to reach the second floor and wait there for Hamford James.

Cautiously I looked through the dining-room window. The man had his back turned to me and all I could see was a black coat collar, a white dress collar and a shock of flaming red hair. There was a woman, but I could not see her distinctly. As far as I could tell, there was no one on the second floor. Creeping up the

front steps, I cautiously tried the front door. It opened. Only a few seconds more and I was on the landing leading from the winding steps to the second floor. Now I had to determine which was James' bedroom.

Not so easy, but all of them were lighted. The first one I entered was distinctly feminine. Nothing of the male there; so I tried another. This was unoccupied, and looked like a guest room. The third room seemed to be more promising. It was the room of a scientist, books everywhere and a dictaphone by the table. It was really a suite, library, bedroom and bath. That must be the place.

I arranged for every emergency as rapidly as I could. A candlestick seemed heavy enough to fell an elephant. A pair of cords from the bathroom curtains and a heavy Turkish towel would have their use. Everything in order, I waited. I was tired, trembling and hungry, but within me was a fire that could not be quenched.

At last I heard steps, and from my place behind the door I saw the knob turn. The door opened, and the man entered. I struck with the candlestick and the man crumpled to the floor.

Closing the door, I turned him over and tied his hands behind him and then his feet, and to make sure, another rope around his knees and the towel in his mouth as a gag. A moment's pause and I saw what had saved me from being a murderer. He had on a peculiar wig of heavy red bristling hair, and a yellow mask over the upper part of his face. The wig broke the force of the blow, but none the less it was heavy enough to keep him unconscious the rest of the night.

Locking the door, I took him by the coat collar and dragged him into the bathroom, and then, drawing the shades, I turned on the water. It was the first time I had seen myself since the end of last March, and when I looked in the glass I did not know whether to laugh or cry. What a face and what a man! I simply had to do one thing before taking the bath. Irrespective of anything else I had to shave. The toilet cabinet seemed rather destitute of shaving equipment, but at last I found a safety razor and a brush. A longer search, this time in the sitting-room, revealed a long scissors, evidently used for making newspaper clippings.

Cutting my hair as best I could, I ended up by shaving. It hurt, but felt so comfortable when I had finished. Then I drew water in the tub and bathed. These things may seem too trivial to place in such a serious narrative, but they went far to establish my confidence and self-respect. Long minutes were spent on finger nails. The ulcers were gingerly washed and painted with iodine. At last, with hair combed and a silk pajama-suit on, I was ready for bed.

Hamford James was still asleep. I put a pillow under his head, turned him on his side, eased the gag a trifle, but not too much, and then went and turned down the bedclothes. What a bed!

19. The Day After

SINKING into the luxurious bed, clean, shaved, almost sterilized as far as my body was concerned, with every part of me enjoying the comfort of refined civilization after weeks of hell, I lost no time in going to sleep. It may have been foolish conduct, but, after all, it was justified. The door was locked. I was sure that Hamford James was safe, and what better thing than sleeping could I do?

The next thing I knew was the ringing of the telephone and a voice insisting that it was six-thirty. I was rather confused, but managed to say that I wanted

breakfast served in my room at eight. Then I went in to the bathroom to see James. He was still asleep, but showed signs of rousing from his coma. I took advantage of his stupor to take off the gag and remove the wig and mask. Under these was the placid face of a middle-aged man, with rather gentle features. The gag went back on. He might look gentle, but any one who had the murder of thousands of his fellow men on his soul was not one to be trifled with.

A search through closets gave me clothes which I judged usual for the morning attire of the scientist, a golf-suit with plus-four trousers, and a fairly quiet sweater. Then, before the mirror, I adjusted the wig and mask. Horrors! What a masquerade! And what was the idea? Evidently, from the overheard conversation, the man wore this mask during the period of the yearly experiment. It gave me, would give any one, a most peculiar appearance. It suddenly occurred to me that there had been an effort made to imitate the head of a wasp. Perhaps that was it. While the solitary hunters were killing the convicts, this man dressed as one and enjoyed the murders in a spiritual, vicarious manner. At least, that seemed to be as good an explanation as any I could think of.

And, wearing the mask, I opened the door, directed that the breakfast be placed on the table and that I be left alone.

It was a good breakfast, and I felt additionally courageous after it. A trip to the bathroom showed me that Hamford James was still in stupor, but, to make sure of him, I put some more curtain ropes to work. After that I spent fifteen minutes in hard thinking. At the end of that time I went to the telephone and gave orders that Milford be sent to my rooms. I left the door a little open, sat at the desk and prepared for the worst, and that might be bad enough if my disguise were discovered.

MILFORD came into the room. He stood in front of the desk and I let him stand. Feeling my way, I asked,

"Everything all right?"

"Yes, Master."

"Give me a brief report."

"The crater is clear. The dead wasps have all been thrown down the hole. The cellar is in good condition. We have made a thorough search of the huts and there are no living convicts. The storeroom is in excellent condition and you have enough food of every kind to last till the next shipment arrives the first of next March."

"Very good. You and the men had better go. The service has been excellent and I want you to see that each man has the promised bonus."

"Thanks, Master. We will leave at once. There is one thing I ought to tell you. The insane man has been very irritable lately. I am afraid he is sick."

"I will attend to him after you leave. You can go now. If there is anything else you think of, see my secretary." This last was a shot in the dark.

"One thing more, Master. How about the prisoner? You gave orders that he was to be killed before we left. That ought to be attended to."

"I will do that myself. I think that I can use him in some of my experiments. He was a blond type, as I remember it. Just what I need. Give the key of his cell to my secretary and tell her about him and ask her to call my attention to him. Now go, and don't forget the bonus for the men. Tell them not to get drunk. Too much liquor make garrulous tongues."

He left the room; if he had any doubts as to my identity, he at least kept

his suspicions to himself. It occurred to me that he had never seen Hamford James without the mask and wig.

There were some more things to think of, but everything was working out well. In a short time Milford and his six helpers would be out of the crater, and then who would be left? An insane man who was very irritable, a prisoner who was a blond (I hoped that would turn out to be King), Hamford James securely tied in my bathroom and perhaps dying from a fractured skull, a woman who might be anybody but whom I wanted to be little Joan, and myself. There might be other servants, but I doubted it.

At least, things were better than they were. Lots of unanswered questions, but not as desperately uncertain as they had been a week before. If I could make satisfactory contact with the prisoner, he would be of great help to me. The secretary might or might not be my friend. The insane man was a problem. Just what to do with Hamford James was another problem. I did not want him to die, and I did not want him to live to be a menace to my plans. I feared him, and I felt that only with his life extinct were we safe.

Making up my mind to take another shot in the dark, I went to the phone and told the voice at the other end that I would be down for dinner at two and would like to have company. Just that. "Like to have company." I did not wait for an answer. A multimillionaire does not wait for answers. He simply gives orders.

THE rest of the morning I spent going through the desk. It was not very sporting to snoop through another man's desk, but I wanted to find out all I could. That was not much. There were a number of diaries but they were filled in in shorthand and like so much Greek to me. A revolver, in very good condition and loaded, I placed in my pocket. Then I went and washed out James' mouth, eased his ropes a little to relieve the congestion of his hands, and felt his pulse. Still alive. Much as I hated to, I put the gag back in his mouth.

And then down to dinner. My idea was to keep a stately silence and let the woman talk, for I was sure that she would. She had no hesitancy in expressing her opinion when she was talking to James out near the huts. No matter what her reason for being in the crater, she was not in any way a coward.

Once downstairs, I looked at my watch, a beauty I had taken from James' pocket. It was a few minutes to two; so I went to the library and glanced over the books. Soon the woman came into the room.

"Dinner is served, Mr. James."

She was a young woman, not a girl by any means, but still in the bloom of early womanhood. Without a word I turned and followed her to the dining-room, where there was service for two at a table that could have seated twelve. I sat at one end and she at the other. A woman, old, rather stout, and neatly dressed, served the soup. One more to the permanent population, one more I had not counted on.

At the end of the soup the young woman looked up.

"You did not keep your promise, Mr. James," she said. "The idea was to remove that hideous disguise."

"Force of habit, I suppose, and anyway one day more will not make any difference. Did Milford and the men get away?"

"Yes, just like clockwork."

"Did he give you my orders?"

"Yes."

"I mean in regard to the prisoner and the insane man?"

"Yes."

"Have you the keys?"

"Yes."

"I am sorry we kept the prisoner alive. He should have been thrown out into the crater. Kindness is so often misinterpreted. Still, I may be able to use his blood in my laboratory, if it is the right type."

"You know what I think of you?"

"Very well, my dear girl. Something in the nature of a human monster, and, still, you have had a very sheltered home here. It might have been worse."

"And it might have been better for me had I kept quiet about my sex and allowed one of your pets to carry me into a tunnel after giving me a lethal dose. I was a coward to try and save my life."

"But think of all these pleasant years, good food, comfortable home, nice dresses."

She shook her head and changed the subject,

"I sent Nora down with some food for the insane man and she thinks that he is worse than usual. He was laughing a good deal."

"It is hard to understand what he has to laugh at. But I wish you would brighten up a little. If you act this way, you are not going to be very pleasant company this fall and winter."

"Why should I be pleasant and happy?"

All I could think of was to have the meat course brought in. The rest of the meal was spent in silence.

"We will eat at seven," I ordered. "The usual supper. And now I am going to my rooms. Not feeling well. Goodbye."

Back in my apartment I found that Hamford James was gone.

20. Again a Prisoner

THE curtain cords were there, the Turkish towel I had used for a gag was there, but Hamford James was gone. I went and locked the door. In a moment my glistening bubbles were broken, my sense of security gone. Instead of being in command of the situation, I was in a most dangerous position. James knew the house. He knew where I was. All he had to do was to wait till I came out of the apartment and shoot me from ambush. He could stop the food, and I would have to come out. If I went through the window out into Rose Crater, all he had to do was to turn on the protective wall of electricity and let me starve to death.

I determined to wait till supper and then have a showdown. At least I had a revolver, and if I had to die, I could die with a clean body and a well-shaved face.

That led me to take a bath and shave. For a little while I took off the hot wig and mask. After dressing, this time in formal evening clothes, I carefully examined the revolver and made sure that it was in working order. Finding a pair of yellow kid gloves in the dress coat pocket, I put them on. It made me look more like a wasp than ever. Then I turned on the desk light, and, to console myself, read Fabre on the hunting wasps. Quite appropriate, I thought.

At seven I went downstairs, not very happily, expecting at any moment to be shot in the back. But nothing happened, and I found a little additional courage. The young woman was waiting for me and was in no way happier than she had been at dinner.

The supper was somber. But at last it was over and the woman told Nora she could leave the room till sent for. Then she came around the table, took a chair on my left and sat down.

"I want to talk to you, Mr. James."

"That is all right; go ahead."

It was a ray of sunshine. James' private secretary did not know that he had escaped from me. She still thought that I was James, or else she was a very good actor.

"I have been your secretary for over seven years, Mr. James. When are you going to give me my liberty?"

"Never."

"You have said that before. You remember that I never gave you any promises. I mean in regard to escaping."

"You can not escape," I said. I wanted to get her angry, wanted to have her tell me what she knew.

"At least, I have given you your chance," she said intensely. She was really beautiful when she was angry.

I toyed with my coffee, and then——

Fireworks exploded in my head, and I slumped in my chair.

"Let me go ahead and kill him, Joan," I heard a voice say from a distant planet, but another voice refused,

"No. He is one of the worst men I ever heard of, but I can not let you kill him. Not that way. I can not feel that I helped kill him. It is not necessary, Ralph."

"Then we will tie him up. Not taking any chances on this bird. Look at this revolver he was carrying. Get me some rope."

I tried to talk, but they were too many miles away to hear me. And my head hurt and I could not understand who Ralph was and why he wanted to kill me. This was the end. Either way, it was the end. I was done for and when the real James came on the scene, Ralph would be done for. I called again, tried to tell them to take off the wig and mask, but they were too far away. The man picked me up, threw me across his shoulders like a bag of bran and carried me somewhere, threw me on the floor and locked the door.

A most uncomfortable position!

21. I Find Friends

AT SOME distant time I recovered consciousness. Of course, my head ached and my arms and legs were most uncomfortable, but my mind was perfectly clear. If the secretary came in, or the man who had helped her, I was confident that I could show them that I was not James and thus warn them of their real danger. But if they took this opportunity to escape from the crater, it was just hard luck for me. James would kill me beyond a doubt. No mercy could be looked for from him.

Later I heard whispers, and then they came into the bathroom, the woman and the man, and the man was the boss, my friend King. He did not recognize me, but I knew him right away. And in spite of all, I closed my eyes and thanked God that he had found his little sister, Happy, for I knew, without a word being said, that this young woman was Joan, the main reason for my coming to Rose Crater.

"How are you feeling, Mr. James," Joan asked.

"Fair, except for my head. Lucky I had my wig on or this young man would have broken my skull. Would you mind taking it off and seeing how the scalp is?"

She was going to do it, but her brother protested.

"Let him be, Joan. He is dangerous. No telling what is in his mind."

"You are a fine boss!" I laughed. "Only thing you know how to do is to hit an old friend on the head and then let him suffer. Come on, King, snap out of it, and take the wig off. I don't want your sister to see me this way."

"What is he talking about, Ralph?" the woman asked.

But the boss was on the floor, tearing off the wig and the mask.

"Glory, man! I might have killed you! Why didn't you tell Joan who you were? Joan, did you suspect that he wasn't James? But, Prince, I forgot that you didn't know. Allow me to introduce you to my sister, Joan, the little girl, Happy, we came into Rose Crater to find."

I acknowledged the introduction. The whole course of events left me somewhat dazed, though no doubt the blow on the head added to my confusion.

"So you really got into the big house, King?" I asked.

"Sure did!"

"Then, by the Seven Sacred Caterpillars, put a wet towel around my head, make me comfortable in an armchair and tell me all about it. I had given you up for dead, though when I heard there was a prisoner I hoped that it might be you."

"It happened this way," began King. "My idea about going somewhere in the big food-can was correct. I simply waited till dark, picked out an empty can, crawled in, and closed the lid over my head. It was rather messy and smelly and hot but it worked. Sometime during the night I felt the platform going down, and then the can I was in was lifted and placed on some kind of a truck; at least, I could hear a gasoline engine start when the can moved. The men in the cellar must have known I was in the can, they would have been foolish if they could not have told by the difference in the weight.

"They never tried to take the lid off. Just clamped it on tight and poured some chloroform into the can through a small hole in the lid. I passed out.

"When I came to they had me in a cell, nicely furnished and all that, but it was all bunk, because they had chained me to a large ring in the floor. What is the use of a Morris chair and books if you are chained like a wild animal? They knew just how long that chain was, and when they fed me they very carefully pushed it toward me so I couldn't reach them.

"On the second day I had visitors. Three of them, and one was the most peculiar man I had ever seen. He had a mask on, red hair and an inhuman face of a yellow color. He looked more like an insect than anything else. A man he called Milford was with him, and, to my great astonishment, the third person was my sister. I nearly gave myself away, but Happy was grand. She never moved an eyelash, just looked at me as though I were one of the dirty convicts; and I know I was dirty enough.

"The man started to talk to me. He told me that as a general rule they killed any of the convicts who were bright enough to try to escape by means of the food-cans, but that Milford had told him that this one was a particularly fine specimen of a man; so he had decided to keep me for experimental purposes.

"He went into a lot of detail, rather unnecessary, I thought at the time, but the main idea was that I was to be given daily injections of hornet poison. Finally, my blood would become loaded with an antitoxin. At the proper time I would be bled to death and the serum used to protect him and his workers against accidental stinging by one of his pets.

"It appears he was rather busy at the time and did not want to start working on me at once. In the meantime I would be well fed and given every opportunity to be in the best physical condition possible. The amount of antitoxin he secured and its purity depended on my health; so he urged me to eat a lot and take my daily exercise. Mad! I thought at the time he was insane, but all the time

Happy was standing there, well and in excellent spirits as far as I could see; so it seemed that the only thing to do was to be civil to him and trust to Happy for the future.

"Somehow she got the key, and hid me behind the curtain. We were going to make James a prisoner, and secure our escape, and all we did was to hit you on the head and pretty near kill you."

"At least, I am glad that the three of us are alive," I said laughing, and then I suddenly remembered what I should have remembered from the first, and all the time I had been sitting there, listening to the King, when I should have been preparing to defend our lives.

"We must go upstairs," I whispered. "Back to James' apartment. I will tell you about it when we get there."

ONCE in the big chair at the desk, with the door locked, I breathed easier. Then I told them my story, and ended with,

"Now, where is Hamford James? I suppose you realize that so long as that question is unanswered, all of us are in danger of our lives. The man will kill without warning. He is probably planning to kill right now."

The brother and sister looked at each other in astonishment. For the first time they realized that since I was not Hamford James he must still be somewhere in the house.

"And I thought all the time you were James," Joan stammered.

"I was for a while. There were a good many hours when I was James and the real James was bound and gagged in the bathroom. But he is gone now. Must have had some help."

"But there was no one," insisted Joan. "I know every one left in the crater at this time. Nora didn't do it; at least, I do not think she did; and I am sure Ralph did not help him, and, of course, you would have no reason for doing so."

"How about the insane man?"

"He is a harmless old fellow. Has not been out of his apartment to my knowledge for over seven years. He was there, insane, when I came."

"Can he get out?"

"He never has. He has been locked up. James told me he was dangerous and not to be trusted."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know. All I do know is that James considered him mildly insane."

Ralph Serpolis (my old friend King) now made a suggestion,

"I think that we ought to look him up. One of three things has happened. Either he helped James, or Nora helped him, or James was able to loose himself. Why not go and see the old man?"

"We can do that," said Joan. "I have the key."

She looked over the bunch she carried at her belt.

"That is odd!" she exclaimed. "It was on the bunch when I gave it to Nora last night to open his door to feed him. It looks as though Nora were involved in this."

"What do you know about Nora, Joan?" asked her brother.

"Not much. She has always been here. As far as I know she has never left the crater. She was a silent woman, but a good cook."

"Let's go and see the old man," I insisted. "The King can go first, then Miss Serpolis and I will bring up the rear with my gun."

It was useless precaution. Down the steps and to the first floor and then down into the basement and past long rows of doors and storerooms, till at last we came to one with bars on it.

"This is the place," said Joan. "And now, what? I have no key. I suppose we could jimmy the door with a crowbar."

"No need of that," whispered the boss. "The door is open. Let's go in."

"Is he dangerous?" I asked.

"No. I have never seen him so. Irritable at his confinement, and there was one thing more——"

"What was that?" I asked.

"Just an insane idea; too fantastic to give any thought to."

"Well, what was it?" I insisted.

"He claimed that he was Hamford James."

"Of course, that was a silly insane thought," whispered her brother. "You knew James very well, didn't you, Joan?"

"I should. I worked as his secretary for seven years."

At the end of the room that we were in there was a doorway opening into a room that was evidently used as a study. A flat-topped desk stood in the middle of this room, and there sat a white-haired man, busily writing. We walked slowly toward him and were nearly touching the desk before he looked up.

"Hello, Joan, how are you today?"

"Very well, thank you."

"And who are these men?"

"This one is my brother, Ralph Serpolis, and the other gentleman——" She looked at me with a question.

"My name is Prince," I said.

"Sit down," he urged. "Glad to see you. Of course, you know who I am. I am Mr. Hamford James, the millionaire entomologist and the owner of Rose Crater."

"Yes," exclaimed Joan, rather nervously. "I know about that. You have told me about that before."

"But you never would believe me," insisted the old man in an irritable voice. "What is the use of telling you something when you never would believe me? But I have proof now. You have to believe me now. It has taken a long time to do it, but at last I convinced Nora that it was all right to let me have the key. So, once I got out, the rest was easier, far easier than I thought."

"You can prove that you are Hamford James?" I asked.

"I can and I will. You come to my bedroom."

22. James Tells His Story

WE FOLLOWED him to his bedroom. There, on the bed, spread-eagled, hands and feet securely tied to the four corners, was a man. A pillow was under his head, and on that pillow was a blood clot. The eyes were open and in those eyes was a hatred that was not human, and the hate of hell was directed toward the insane man.

"Now, on that bed," the old man said, in a very mild voice, "is the proof that I am Hamford James."

I took the old man by the shoulder and tried to agree with him; at least, I tried to keep on good terms with him.

"No doubt you are right, Mr. James, but right or wrong, you have done us a valuable service, because this man you have tied on the bed is a very dangerous man, and what worried us was the fact that we thought he was at liberty. Tied up as he is, he can not hurt us, but, seriously speaking, that man is Hamford James. You know him, Miss Serpolis; you worked for him a long time."

"Yes, that is the man I worked for," said the girl.

"And he is the man I hit on the head with the candlestick and nearly killed, would have killed had it not been for his red wig," I added. "He is the man who has been running the crater all these years, so he must be Hamford James."

"No," the old man insisted. "He is not Hamford James. I am that man. I am willing to admit that this man has been running the crater, and carrying on the experiments I started, and, I believe, in a very vile way. He has done a lot of things that were bad, very bad, and from a personal standpoint one of those things has been running the crater all these years, under the pretense that I was insane."

"But how can you prove it?" insisted Joan.

"We will leave the room. You look for yourself. That person tied to the bed can not be Hamford James, because she is a woman and not a man."

We left Joan in there and went to the study. The old man was obviously nervous, but not any more so than Ralph and I. Minutes passed. Then Joan came out, trembling in spite of her efforts to quiet herself.

She sat down, and simply looked at the old man.

"Well?" he asked at last.

"That part of it is right," she said. "The person on the bed is a woman. I worked for her for over seven years as private secretary and never suspected it. Ralph, did you ever see a madwoman? You go and see that one on the bed. I think she would have cut my throat with her teeth if she could have reached me. What is her name, Mr. James?"

"She happens to be my wife," was the unexpected reply.

"Tell us the story," I urged. "Miss Serpolis, take it down in shorthand and we will use it as an affidavit if necessary."

"There is not much to tell," began the old man, "but I do want to say this in her defense. I think that the woman is insane, and, to that extent, not to be blamed for her conduct. I was working on the solitary hunters for a great many years, and she was of great value to me in all my experiments. I wanted to grow large wasps. I thought that if I could get them big enough, I might use the same procedure with mice and grow a new source of food for the world. It was not very much trouble growing them a little larger with each generation and even changing their hunting habits. First I used rats, then rabbits, and then pigs, and for a good many years the wasps were large enough to hunt steers. We did the work in Rose Crater, an ideal situation. About ten years ago my wife and I quarreled. Of course, we had done so before, but that time I lost my temper and called her a wasp. I suppose that was the spark that set off her insanity. The first thing I knew she had me trapped. For several years she fed me some narcotic, but after a while she stopped that and allowed me to retain what little brains I had left, even made it possible for me to continue my research work. Nora knew who I was, as she was an old family servant, but she was so afraid of my wife that she did not dare to help me. It was only yesterday that I at last persuaded her to unlock the door. I went to my apartment fully intending to kill my wife if she did not give me my liberty, and found her in a stupor, bound and gagged in the bathroom. I brought her down here and tied her, and it was well I did, because she became conscious an hour after I placed her on the bed, and since then her language has been rather unpleasant."

"That is a most remarkable story, Mr. James," I commented. "Do I understand that you are absolutely in ignorance of the use your wife has made of Rose Crater since she made you a prisoner?"

"Practically. I had an idea that something was very wrong, but no one would talk to me about it, and, with the excep-

tion of Nora, all the servants were new and absolutely under her control."

"Then the tunnel of Hellgate, with its rat-traps and the glass houses for the convicts and the entire mechanism for the feeding of the convicts, was the invention of your wife?"

"I am not sure what you are talking about, for it is all new to me. What do you mean when you speak of the convicts?"

"You don't know?"

"No."

There was no doubt that the old man was telling the truth.

"Suppose we go into the other room and see your wife," I suggested.

THE woman in the other room was not doing well. She had evidently been badly hurt when I crashed into her head with the candlestick. Her spasm of hatred was over and she just looked tired.

"Do you want to make a statement, Mrs. James?" I asked. "You are sick and may die. Perhaps you want to die with a full confession."

"I do not care about that," she said. "I did what I wanted to do, and that is more than most women are able to say. My husband drove me to it. He irritated me, used to say that no woman living had a brain as good as a man's. It was not true, because I was of great help to him in his experiments. It got so that I hated men, all of them. I used to envy the female wasps when I saw how they dominated things and killed any one they wanted to. It seemed to me that nothing would give me more pleasure than to kill men, lots of them, not in an easy pleasant death but in a savage way, have them eaten, while still alive, by the solitary hunter's progeny.

"I made my plans and put my husband in prison. I knew that he would never agree to my program. After I locked him up it took over two years to make the new tunnel and put the huts in. Just the feeding of my proposed gang of men was a rather complicated matter. The feeding of the adult wasps was something my husband had worked out.

"Everything and everybody worked into my hands. The nation became hysterical over the crime situation, and when I offered Rose Crater to the Government and the care of the prisoners free of cost, they eagerly accepted the offer. So that year I was able to stop buying steers. Of course, it was a gamble. I did not know just how the wasps would react to men, but they made short work of the first five hundred, and after that the number was a thousand a year.

"My idea was to plant a number of larvæ over in the Gobi Desert. Eventually the human race might have had a very serious enemy. It made me feel fine to think that I would be the cause of it all, but that the man, Hamford James, would get all the credit for the crime.

"I don't know how the slip came. Something went wrong. Perhaps it was because I let the girl live on here. It would have been better to have sent her back to the world.

"What I was afraid of was a scientific investigation. I tried to counter by giving employment to every entomologist who was worth while. I was afraid of Serpolis. Was he mixed up in this?"

"Slightly," I replied. "This man is his son, Ralph, and I was sent in by Serpolis to find out about Joan. So, you see, if there has been a conflict between the two of you, he has won."

"I hate them all," cried the woman, straining at her bonds. "I never met a man I couldn't hate in a most vivid manner. If I could, I would like to tear you

all to pieces, just as my dear little worms do. But it is too late now, too late now."

She fell back on the bed.

An hour later she was dead.

WE BURIED her out in the sands of Rose Crater.

After that we took the old man back to his apartment, the one his wife had robbed him of so many years ago. After years of imprisonment it was hard for him to adjust himself to freedom. But there was one thing we did decide upon, and that was that never again must the insect race be developed so as to become a menace to mankind. Dynamite, freely used, destroyed all the dormant larvæ, and thus the work of years came to an end.

A month later, after everything was done, Hamford James, Joan and her brother, Nora and myself walked through the old tunnel, out of Rose Crater. Three days later we took supper with Serpolis.

It was a happy meal. The old gangster had made his peace with the Government and no longer lived under a shadow.

After supper Serpolis took me to one side.

"How much do I owe you, my dear boy?" he asked.

"Not one cent," I replied. "I brought your daughter back, but I am going to rob you again."

"I thought so. Joan, come over here."

She came. Her father smiled as he patted her arm,

"This man says he is going to steal you, Joan. How about it?"

"Must be true, Dad," she replied. "He is a solitary hunter, you know, and I guess he is bound to have his own way."

[THE END]

Ghouls of the Sea

By J. B. S. FULLILOVE

The story of a ghastly horror that came up out of the sea and spread death aboard the freighter Kay Marie

MOST readers of the daily papers, and especially those persons who follow with interest those accounts relating to the men of the sea, will recall the strange disappearance of the freighter *Kay Marie* some seven months ago. They will recall the brief flurry of excitement attending her reported foundering with all hands aboard. Desperately storm-ridden and swept far off her course, she sent forlorn appeals for aid, reporting that her rudder had been swept away and her engines seriously damaged. Near-by ships immediately put out to her aid, but her wireless signals suddenly ceased. Apparently she had drifted far, for no trace of her was ever found.

In common with most others, I accept-

ed as the most plausible explanation the theory that, in her crippled condition, she had either been swamped by the mountainous waves or driven to her doom upon some uncharted reef in unknown waters.

But today, with the *Kay Marie* farthest from my mind and all but forgotten, I chanced upon something else. As is often my habit, I had risen before the sun and gone down to a favorite stretch of beach to cast in the surf for bass. As I walked along the shore I stumbled upon a large glass jug lying amid a pile of driftwood and debris. Even before I smashed it with my heavy sand-pike I knew that it contained some message from the sea, for through its salt-caked sides I had seen a flash of white.

And message indeed it was! Part of the manuscript was missing, but the remainder comprises a bizarre and incredible tale which I set down here precisely as I found it. The true account of the *Kay Marie* disaster? That is for the reader to decide.

Here is the account:

". . . calm, and immediate danger is past. But we are completely cut off from the rest of the world and there is nothing to do but wait and hope that some ship picked up our S. O. S. and will find us before our food and water become exhausted.

"There are many sharks about, and to relieve the monotony of waiting, the crew for a time engaged in fishing for them. Two were caught, and then the fishing suddenly stopped. Here is something very strange, something which arouses superstitious fears in the men. Until now I have been unable to ascertain exactly what it is, because the men are all strangely reticent concerning the whole affair. All I have been able to get out of them is that the sharks they caught were dead.

"Svensen, the big Swedish mate, however, tells me that there were curious gobs of pinkish jelly covering their heads. He says that Doctor Curey took samples of the stuff to his cabin for examination.

"It is indeed surprizing that men like Svensen, who can laugh in the teeth of a storm, should exhibit fear at sight of a few dead fish.

"I HAVE just left Doctor Curey in his makeshift laboratory busily engaged in working on the specimen he took from the head of the shark. It somewhat resembles a huge, pink jelly-fish. It has the same disgusting feel, and is without definite form. Still, there are differences. This thing is continually in motion; shimmering at all times as though some one were shaking the table upon which it is placed. A mephitic odor hovers about it, and an indefinable something about it fills me with a kind of loathing and a queer feeling almost of fear. At times I felt as if it were alive and possessed some uncanny power of sight and were watching me.

"Doctor Curey is very much excited. He says that it is an entirely new form of parasitic growth secreting a powerful, bone-dissolving acid which enables it to get at the flesh and blood of its victims. But he, too, is at a loss to explain their immediate and deadly effect when the sharks were taken from the water.

"Captain Wilkes picked up a trail of smoke on the horizon this morning; but they passed us by. We are far from shipping-lanes, and it is good to know that some one is looking for us.

"GOD is indeed merciful! Had the ship we sighted picked us up, what a ghastly horror might have been loosed upon the world! My fear of the strange specimen of Doctor Curey was

well founded. It is a spawn of the nethermost depths of some hell of the sea.

"I was engaged in working on my hopelessly damaged apparatus when suddenly a scream echoed through the ship. It was a scream of paralyzing horror and fraught with agony, but through its terror I recognized it as the voice of Doctor Curey.

"Perhaps no one else knew wherefrom the scream had come, for I was the first to reach the cabin of the stricken man. As I rushed in, I saw the doctor seated in a darkened corner, where, I judged, he must have fallen asleep. Only the pale rays of the moon lighted the room, and I could not see plainly, but there was something peculiar about the way he sat. He seemed strangely stiff and as straight as a statue. Apoplexy! instantly flashed through my mind. I shouted to him and stepped closer.

"At the sound of my voice, he half turned and rose slowly from his chair. Something about his movements abruptly checked my rush toward him. The peculiar, frightful *stiffness* of his actions is impossible to describe. They were the movements of a reawakened corpse who tries to force worm-eaten muscles into the forgotten movements of life.

"With my heart still, I stood motionless and watched him as he painfully arose. Once again I called to him in a voice hoarsened by strange fear. As if in answer, he turned. At the same time my hand darted swiftly to my pocket, and with trembling fingers I lighted a match against the wall. As it flared up, I looked into his face and sank to my knees with a low gasping cry. The flickering light of the match was dim, but, even so, that first view of the horror was so indelibly stamped upon my brain that even now—days later—as I write, I can still see it vividly, frightfully.

"The face staring sightlessly into mine was a white, drawn mask of insupportable agony. The blackened tongue, grown sickeningly to astounding length, protruded from half-open lips. He seemed to be trying to scream. His eyes were leaping from their sockets, and already there was forming over them a cold and ghastly glaze. . . . *The man walking stiffly toward me was plainly dead!*

"And then as the last flickering rays of the match burned out between my fingers, I saw. . . .

"Until now, I had not thought of any connection between the doctor's experiments and *this*. I had unconsciously supposed him to have fallen victim to some new and horrible disease. But with the last dimming ray of the match, a glimmering of the incredible truth burst upon me with terrible clearness. Even then my dazed and weakened mind refused to grasp the full significance of what I saw in all its ghastliness.

"The top of his head was a shimmering mask of dark red jelly, and from it I could see a long tongue of the same unspeakable stuff slithering down the back of his neck. The whole loathsome mass seemed to swell and grow from his skull with unbelievable rapidity. Despite the awful dazedness of my mind, I still noted the significant change in the color of the mass . . . and that mingled with its grisly red, there were flecks of white and gray.

"As in a dream I heard excited voices and knew that the room had filled with men. I saw the captain, with a curious glance at me, dart forward and catch the swaying doctor in his arms. Frozen with horror, I could only stare—and wait.

"As swiftly as the movement of a striking snake—too swiftly for the eye to follow—a tongue of the dribbling mass hanging nearly to the doctor's shoulders licked out and spattered upon the cap-

tain's head. He clawed madly at his hair for a moment, gave vent to a single agonized scream, then slumped forward. He stiffened almost before he struck the floor; then with the same frightful rigidity that the doctor had shown, he slowly sat up, then rose to his feet.

"The horror upon his head had sunk in, disappearing beneath his matted hair. Now it reappeared, growing, swelling like a toy balloon—a shuddersome mass of quivering, sensate jelly, whose soul-chilling scarlet was thickly dotted with white and gray. . . .

"Miraculously then my power of movement returned. Gasping weakly, I stumbled toward the door. I saw the thing that had been the doctor move also, and a ghastly hint of its intention thrust itself into my stunned consciousness, lending speed to my laggard limbs. Close behind me, it circled the milling, craning crowd, who still could not understand; or having seen, stood rooted, held powerless to move by sheer ecstasy of horror. I staggered through the door and sank exhausted to the deck. Behind me the door slammed shut, and there came the sound of a heavy body falling against it.

"For some moments, then, there was silence; then from behind the door there came the ghastly sound of scream after scream of mortal agony and horror, the sound of thudding bodies and of madly stamping feet; but now and then above this hellish din I could hear with terrible distinctness a faint *splat, splat,* like the sound of wet rags falling upon the floor.

"Only a short time I lay thus. Then I remember somewhat vaguely running madly and mingling my screams with the screams of the imprisoned men. For the madness of terror that had descended upon me was now complete. *Just in time I had risen, warned by reflected moonbeams shining into my eyes, and seen the faintly luminous, slithering rill of the jelly that was flowing out toward me from under the door.* . . .

"WHEN I regained consciousness later—whether days or weeks I do not know— I found that I had bolted myself within my own cabin. In the fever of madness I had stuffed up every crack and hole in the walls and door. Still there is everywhere the indescribable stench of the things. I am now certain that I must have been insane much longer than I at first believed, for now I can detect another odor. But upon that I dare not dwell. The picture it brings is too unutterably horrible for contemplation in my weakened state . . . rotting corpses, animated by hellish creatures who supplant their brains, walking in ghastly parades across the decks! . . .

"Am I alone? Outside I can hear the slow tramping of feet. Whether they are the feet of living men or of the horror I dare not look to see. I shout, but never is there an answer. The things I hear outside number many.

"But there is a way out if I am swift. There is powder in the hold. If I can reach it, a match will save me through quick death from the other end I face. Besides, the *Kay Marie* must never be found or allowed to drift too near to land.

"If the things are waiting when I step outside the door, at least I shall have tried to send them back to where they belong —at the bottom of the sea."

The Nightmare Road

By FLORENCE CROW

A startling, sensational story of a vampire-infested region in the Hartz Mountains of Germany, and a blood-chilling adventure

THE wind moaned dismally around the eaves of the hunting-lodge and the cold rain beat against the windows, making us all grateful for the cheer and warmth of the big, open fireplace.

There were five of us who had come up to J. P. Draper's lodge for a little holiday. Draper was a genial man in his middle thirties, well educated and widely traveled. He knew good liquors and told a story well—quite the ideal host. He was of distinguished appearance; with a broad streak of perfectly white hair drawn straight back from just above his right eyebrow to a little below the crown of his head in the back, where it became intermingled with the black and finally was lost. He had an odd mannerism of caressing the white streak when in deep thought, which, of course, drew attention to it.

We had all been in a reminiscent mood and telling some tall tales. Somehow our talk had turned to things occult and supernatural. I think the loneliness of the lodge and the dismal rain, with the tapping of the ends of the limb of a tree on the window-pane, like ghostly finger-tips, had something to do with it.

Finally some one asked J. P. to tell us some experience he might have had that was touched with the occult. J. P. was stroking his white streak in that absent-minded way of his, but he looked up at the speaker and said,

"I shall tell you about something that happened a couple of years ago when I was in Germany.

"I was on a hiking tour through the Hartz Mountain district. As you know, the more elevated portions are rough and dreary and the soil is sterile, but the scenery is very interesting, with the rounded and graceful form of the Brocken towering above all the other mountains. The Rosstrappe, which stands near by in the same group, is not so tall but is far more rugged in aspect than the Brocken, and it was in this district that the events occurred which I shall relate.

"I had been enjoying it all immensely until the night of All Hallows Eve. The goal I had set for the evening was the town of Goslar, situated on the Gose at the base of the Rammelsberg. There are some public buildings there I wished to see which were erected in the Fifteenth Century: the imperial palace, in part a ruin, and the Gothic church, the treasure of which is a number of Luther's manuscripts.

"The people of this town, and indeed of the whole district, are hard-working and God-fearing. The more ignorant are, however, very superstitious, believing in all sorts of witchcraft, charms and magic. Several friendly persons had mentioned that it was All Hallows Eve, that vampires, witches and other cohorts of the devil would be abroad that night and it were well that all good folk should be indoors with a holy cross on the door to protect them.

"I paid no attention to their talk, of course, and the day itself was uneventful except that toward evening, when I realized that it would be after dark before I could reach Goslar, I stopped for refreshments. The good woman who served me offered the hospitality of her home for the night and warned me against being abroad after sundown. I thanked her but said I would press on, as I would surely arrive in Goslar in time to secure lodging. She appeared troubled that I insisted on departing and at the moment of my departure thrust a crude, wooden cross into my hand, saying,

" 'All who are abroad tonight will be in great peril and will surely need the protection of the holy cross. Keep it with you. They will try to get it away from you, but don't let it go a minute. They will try all sorts of tricks, but don't let them have it. Don't let them fool you.'

"I felt foolish, but I thanked her for her kindness, and thrusting it into my pocket, forgot all about it until later.

"As the sun neared the horizon that evening an air of expectancy seemed to hover over the land, and the long shadows cast by the strange rock formations took on weird shapes. A queer, coppery glow covered the sky and the whole earth appeared to bask in the reflected glow from some vast devil's pit. The wind blew cold and chill and moaned as it rushed by, as though it fled in fear of something.

"WHEN the sun sank from sight I looked toward the west, and a long line of birds or bats was streaming across the sky. With that infernal glow behind them, it created a most uncanny effect. I could well understand how an ignorant and superstitious person might imagine them to be vampires, bats and witches flying to some unholy tryst.

"I was swinging along at an easy pace but still covering the ground in good time, when I heard a feeble hail. It came from a little distance from the road, and I stopped and listened. It came again from the direction of a mass of rocks, and I turned my steps toward them. As I neared the rocks I saw a poor, feeble old man lying in a twisted position as though in pain.

" 'Are you hurt, my good man?' I asked as I bent to raise him from the ground.

" 'Yes, but do not touch me, I am badly hurt. I think I am dying. All day I have lain here waiting for help, and now I fear it is too late. Before I die I should like to see the holy cross. Do you have one?'

"I remembered the one I had in my pocket and drew it forth and was about to place it in the old man's hand when he spoke in a voice astonishingly loud and strong for one dying,

" 'No, no! Put it on the rock here beside me, so that it may be the last thing my eyes behold.'

"I was astonished at his vehemence and the look which crossed his face; almost one of terror, I should say. I was nonplussed for a moment and stood holding it rather uncertainly in my hand. Again the old fellow repeated his request in the weak and whining voice in which he had first spoken. I had stooped over to do as he asked when I happened to glance at his face again. Such a fierce look of exultation and triumph crossed it that I thought of what the old woman had said,

" 'They will try all sorts of tricks.'

"Still it was not with real seriousness that I thought of it, but it occurred to me that he was probably fevered and did not quite know what he said. Therefore, I reasoned, I would place it to his lips, as

would be pleasing to the pious man if his mind were clear.

"I made the move to do so and had almost touched him when a horrible shriek burst from the creature's lips and he leaped up and beyond my reach as though propelled by some mighty force stronger than human muscle and sinew. In an instant he was gone, but the sound of his shriek still trembled on the air.

"Hurrying back to the road, I started off rapidly toward Goslar, thinking to myself that he was probably a robber, but superstitious nevertheless about kissing the cross in the very act of committing a crime. Then I wondered why he had mentioned the cross in the first place. And again the words of the old woman rang in my ears,

" 'They will try to get it away from you.'

"Just a coincidence, I decided; he was merely trying to throw me off guard by pretending to be dying, so that I should be unprepared for an attack. Still, highwaymen were not common in the district.

"At that moment a great night-bird swooped down with an unearthly scream. I almost jumped out of my shoes. Then I laughed as I thought how amusing it was that strange surroundings, loneliness and an unusual experience work on one's nerves till the cry of a harmless bird could throw one into a momentary panic.

"I had gone but a little way when something round and white rolled from behind a large rock. It had grown much darker, and the dim light seemed to play tricks with my sight, for it looked like a skull. I gave myself a mental shake for being such a fool. It couldn't possibly be anything but a rock that some small animal had loosened and it had rolled down an incline.

"I was about to move on when I heard a noise from behind the rocks. I thought of the highwayman and prepared for another attack. Sure enough, something was coming. I could hear someone running over the stones. Suddenly there burst from behind the rocks a skeleton—a hideous, headless human skeleton running after its own skull. The skull kept rolling while the skeleton ran after it and disappeared from sight.

"It was almost too much for me and I muttered aloud, 'I must be crazy, or else they are right and this is the devil's night.'

"There was nothing to do but go on and try to reach Goslar before my imagination should play any more grim jokes on me. I was still holding the wooden cross in my hand, and somehow, imagination or not, I was glad I had it.

"I HAD been hurrying and was somewhat breathless when I saw a light in the distance. It was a welcome sight, and I slowed my pace somewhat, as I did not wish to rush up like a small boy frightened of the dark. As I came nearer I noticed many figures milling about a big fire. Some travelers camping out, I thought; maybe gipsies, I decided, as wild shouts of laughter reached me and I noted that the figures were all moving about quickly in what was undoubtedly some sort of dance. However, I welcomed the thought of being among even so villainous-appearing a lot. I came to within a few hundred feet and halted to look them over before making my presence known.

"My eyes first fell on the bonfire, for so strange a one I had never seen. It burned with a strange, bluish light intermingled with bursts of crimson sparks. It was so remarkable that I scarcely saw the rest of the scene for a moment. Suddenly my fascinated gaze fixed on something moving in the fire. I rubbed my eyes and looked again. The fire was not burning ordinary sticks of wood, but

snakes. Serpents, large and small, squirmed and twisted as though executing some devil's dance of their own as the flames mounted higher.

"A particularly bright flare occurred, lighting up the whole company, and I looked at the people. What people! Their eyes all glowed like the red stop-light on an auto, and their visages were demoniac. They shouted in wild bursts of laughter in which there was no mirth, only echoes of dead curses and groans.

"I tried to turn and slip away, but I could not. I seemed rooted to the spot. I raised my eyes and saw that grimmest of all structures—a gallows. At the end of the rope hanging from the scaffold dangled a human figure.

"My chest suddenly felt as though it were bursting from the horror and pity of beholding a hapless human so murdered by the fiends that made such terrible sport. Even as I watched, the hanged creature began to wave its arms and dance on the air. As it danced, shriller, wilder laughter rang out. Suddenly the rope parted and the creature floated to the ground and joined in the wild revelry.

"My senses were reeling. I thought I had surely gone mad and this was the hell of insanity. I don't know whether I laughed or began to pray . . . I think I tried to pray, and I must have made some noise which attracted the attention of that terrible host, for they all turned at the same instant and rushed toward me. Red light flashed from their fiendish eyes, and clawed hands stretched out to grab me. Instinctively I raised my hands, as one does in trying to ward off a blow, still holding the cross.

"They stopped as though transfixed at sight of what I held in my hands. Suddenly they set up a terrible howling and screeching as they danced and flew about me, but did not come any closer. I perceived that they would not touch me so long as I was thus protected by the cross, and so holding it extended before me I stepped forward. Those directly before me moved aside, leaving a gap, and I passed through.

"Numbers of the awful things followed me and I could hear their screams and wails and the sound of great wings thrashing the air. I stumbled on and on, feeling that I had been on this awful road for ever. I was breathing in great, sobbing gasps; grasping the cross with a strength that numbed my fingers, I tried to pray, but all I could say was, 'Oh God!'

"FAR in the distance I again saw a light. I almost feared to approach it, but there was the chance that it was a house, a human habitation. There was ever a rustling behind me and I felt a cold wind on the back of my neck, like an icy blast from the lowest, frozen pit of hell.

"I stumbled along, and as I came closer to the light I could see that it was shining from the window of a house. Nevertheless, not to betray myself again into the presence of another such company as I had just escaped, I approached the window and looked within.

"There on his knees, I saw the dark-garbed figure of some saintly man of God, his white head bowed in prayer. I knocked on the door and heard the good priest move. I called aloud for admittance and he answered me, asking,

" 'Who is there?'

"I do not know what I answered, but the door was opened and I fell across the threshold, noting as I fell that the mat just within the entrance was made in the design of a cross.

"When I opened my eyes, the glorious mountain dawn had flooded the world with light and I was resting on the good

man's own couch and he sat in a great chair close beside me. He smiled and placed his hand on my forehead, saying,

" 'You are less fevered now, my son. I think you will soon be all right.'

"I felt very grateful to the good priest, but my eyelids were heavy, and I slept.

"After a while the fever left and I was entirely recovered, but since that time this streak of white has marked my otherwise youthful head."

Our host smiled as he stroked the white streak across his head and looked at his guests.

The Late Mourner

By JULIUS LONG

John Sloan received a shock when he looked upon the face in the coffin —an odd little story

JOHN SLOAN awoke from a sound sleep. He sat up and peered through the gloom of his room at the faded face of his old clock. The hands pointed very nearly to two. He had not intended to nap so long. Two o'clock was the hour set for the funeral rites of his dearest friend. His failure to attend the services would be unpardonable. He would have to hurry.

He left his bed with an ease and agility that surprized him. He was very old, and at times it seemed that every muscle and joint of his body ached and pained him. He rang for Chester, his man. There was no answer, and he repeated the summons with vigor. The house remained silent. Sloan was annoyed by his desertion, but he had no time to investigate. He dressed himself hurriedly and fairly ran down the stairs. Somewhere in the house a clock struck two. The funeral services had probably begun.

He decided to walk to the mortuary, an outpost of the commercial invasion of his once aristocratic neighborhood. He quitted his deserted old house and entered the street. The autumn sun was warm and comforting. Brown and red leaves brushed playfully against his ankles. He was cheered and exhilarated by the October scene. It was many years since he had been able to enjoy the outdoors.

At the same time, he was saddened by the thought of his friend's death. Few of his cronies remained alive. Nearly all the world with which he was familiar had passed on. He had never married. There were not even relatives to dwell in his rambling old house.

His reflection was interrupted by the sight of Tom McGann, the policeman, who had walked the beat for fifteen years. He enjoyed seeing Tom, who was a good-natured and voluble fellow with a cheery greeting for all.

"Good afternoon, Tom," said Sloan, trying hard to equal the patrolman's usual smile.

Tom did not answer, but walked silently on, as if he had not seen him. Despite his lateness, Sloan paused and stared after the retreating figure. He was astonished and hurt by the snub. He could not account for such behavior. Had someone circulated a scandal about him? Why had Tom passed him by?

The sun lost its bright glow, and the air lost its soothing warmth. The leaves at his feet annoyed him, and October seemed a dismal and inimical month. A sensitive soul, he could not lightly pass off a slight from any human being. He trudged on to the mortuary, dejected and lonely.

OUTSIDE the funeral home there were parked a great many cars. His friend's death was deeply mourned. Sloan was a bit envious. When he died, he reflected sadly, there would be few to attend his funeral.

Two ushers loitered in the doorway. They did not deign to notice Sloan, as he climbed the several steps. He passed meekly between them and entered the building.

To the left was the entrance of the room in which the obsequies were under way. He waded through the thick carpets and stepped inside. No one in the crowded room seemed to notice his appearance. He discovered an empty seat in the rear. He made his way to it, not without treading on the toes of three persons who were sufficiently well bred to betray no notice of his clumsiness.

He settled himself in his chair and regarded the clergyman, who was concluding the obituary. Its details sounded familiar to his ears, and for the first time that afternoon, he tried to visualize the appearance of his departed friend. He discovered that he could not do so. He had quite forgotten the name and face of the man whom he had regarded as his most intimate companion.

The discovery stunned him. How could he excuse such a stupid lapse of memory? Was he so far gone in his dotage that the most important things in his life could escape his memory? He became frantic, like a schoolboy who has lost his place in his reader and trembles from fear that he will be the next to be called upon.

He tried to recall things that might lead to the recollection of his friend's identity. Where, when and how had he been apprised of his friend's death? How long had he been ill? He plied himself with many such questions, but could answer none of them.

He surveyed the people in the room. They were all known to him. Perhaps he could name his man by the simple process of elimination. One by one, he examined them, but his strategy availed him nothing. His bewilderment was increased by the unaccountable presence of his servants, among whom sat Chester. Why—devil take them!—had they rushed off without him?

He regarded the coffin, which was placed in a front corner of the room. The corpse was not visible. After the services, he would view it and enlighten himself with regard to its identity.

By this time the funeral sermon had been begun, but the minister's words gave no hint as to the name and situation of the departed. Sloan became impatient.

The obsequies dragged to a close. The proprietor of the establishment, with professional suavity, invited the late arrivals to favor the deceased with a last look. Sloan and several others rose and left their seats. Again he tramped on the

toes of his neighbors, who took no notice of his second offense.

He came abreast of the coffin and looked down upon the countenance of the dead man. Enlightenment did not come. The pallid features were familiar, yet so very strange. Had death wrought such changes in his friend that, even now, he would be unable to recognize him?

Dazed, he continued to stare at the lifeless face. Then recognition came. He clutched the coffin for support. He did not attempt to struggle with his suspicions. He knew!

It was his own face that he saw. It was more withered and aged, bloodless and ghastly, yet indisputably his own. It was his body which lay there with its bony hands upon its chest.

With understanding came recollection of the scene which had been effaced from his mind. He lay in his bed. His doctor was authoritatively assuring him that his ailment was insignificant and could not possibly prove fatal. Chester, at his side, looked fearful and worried. Then something choked him. He gasped for breath. The faces of the doctor and Chester were lost in a blur. It must have been then that he had died.

Now he comprehended all. He knew why Tom McGann had not spoken to him, why the ushers had not noticed his arrival. All were oblivious to his presence, because he was without that ugly body which lay in its coffin. No longer would the desires and disappointments of the flesh pain him. Never again would its diseases rack him and try his soul. He was free of it.

It seemed that he was young again and strong and healthy. His thoughts were clear and lucid. Truly he was in the prime of life.

He was aroused from his revery by the sobbing of Chester and his old housekeeper. He would have made them understand that their tears were out of place, that he was alive and happy.

The mourners filed out slowly. Sloan regarded each appreciatively, but pityingly. The room became empty except for the attendants. The lid of the coffin was closed. Sloan was relieved when he saw the dead face disappear. He hoped that he would be able to forget it.

The coffin was wheeled away. He watched its removal with satisfaction. He lingered a moment in the vacant room, then stole silently out, to a new freedom.

Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we too into the Dust descend;
  Dust into Dust, and under Dust to lie,
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and—sans End!

Alike for those who for TODAY prepare,
And those who after some TOMORROW stare,
  A Muezzín from the Tower of Darkness cries,
"Fools! your Reward is neither Here nor There."

—*Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam.*

IN A letter to the Eyrie, J. Wasso, Jr., of Pen Argyl, Pennsylvania, makes his selection of the high points in WEIRD TALES during 1933: "The best issue of the year was the July issue. The best story of the year was *The Dreams in the Witch-House,* by H. P. Lovecraft; the best serial, *Golden Blood,* by Jack Williamson; and the best poem, *A Witch Passes,* by Muriel Cameron Bodkin. The June issue carried the best cover (based on *Black Colossus),* and the best story illustration was the heading for *The Watcher in the Green Room* in the September issue. A. B. Leonard gets a gold medal for the best letter of the year in the Eyrie of the December issue; and Miss Sylvia Bennett gets the booby prize for the silliest letter of the year, in the October issue." [We think you are rather hard on Sylvia. Although we do not agree with the ideas expressed in her letter, still it was an honest expression of opinion.—THE EDITOR.]

Clara L. Heyne, of St. Paul, writes to the Eyrie: "Let's have some more stories like *Revelations in Black* (Jacobi), *The Horror in the Museum* (Heald), and *The Dreams in the Witch-House* (Lovecraft). The latter story I still find absorbing after a dozen readings. Conan and de Grandin are old friends and they can't appear too often. But when I take the magazine to work for reading at noon, I take the cover off because I know how the pictures of nude women affect those who don't know WT."

"It certainly was a shock," writes Joseph Arden, of Detroit, "to see that Clark Ashton Smith had drawn his own illustration for his catchy yarn, *The Weaver in the Vault.* I suggest you keep Mr. Smith on the artist's staff, as his illustration has many of your artists shoved off the map. Mr. Smith must be a man of many and diverse talents. So far in WT, Mr. Smith has only been the outstanding poet and the outstanding author; but now it looks as if he'll become your outstanding artist also."

A letter from Indianapolis, signed "Two faithful but hitherto silent readers," says: "We wish to register our vote in favor of *In the Triangle* as the best story in the January number. Not only was it the best story in the number, but also the best that has appeared in WT for some months. That last paragraph is as fine a bit of writing as we have seen anywhere. The only fault we find with your magazine is the covers—they simply do not belong on a magazine like WEIRD TALES."

Writes Henry Hasse, also of Indianapolis: "So far I have read only two of the stories in your January issue, yet I want immediately to vote for one of them as being the best story in the magazine; without even reading the others, I do this; for no matter how good the others might be, they could not surpass *In the Triangle,* by

Howard Wandrei. Do you realize that that story is *literature?* In the field of the utterly bizarre it runs a close second to Lovecraft's *The Outsider.* It has that same peculiar atmosphere of the unknown. The last paragraph especially seems to enfold you in that atmosphere, and for some moments after finishing it you continue to stare at the page before you, yet seeing nothing, while your mind gropes for some explanation which is not immediately apparent. Is Howard Wandrei a brother or any relation to Donald? You see, readers do like very much to know something about the authors of WEIRD TALES; so please let's have a special page for pictures and biographies." [You have guessed it: Howard Wandrei is Donald Wandrei's brother. Several readers have asked us whether "Howard" is a misprint for "Donald." No, dear readers, Howard and Donald are two distinct persons.—THE EDITOR.]

Vampire stories have long been popular with you, the readers; but here is a protest against them from G. A. Robinson, of Kingston, Jamaica: "For heaven's sake, cut out vampire stories. There is a sameness about them all that is positively wearisome. Give us more adventures of Conan. That's the stuff! Let the yarns be as weird as you like, but let them contain plenty of fighting by red-blooded barbarians. I have been reading your magazine for several years, but if I come across any more vampires—good-bye!"

Robert Bloch, of Milwaukee, writes to the Eyrie: "The person who objected to a depiction of material decay as an example of weirdness is utterly wrong in his reasoning. Weirdness is a quality—a quality inspiring definite emotion, and having certain definite forms of reaction-patterns. One of these emotions or reaction-forms is fear, the fundamental emotion. Now nothing occasions more fear than the unknown. Death comes under this heading—it is an embodiment, the essence, the symbol of the unknown—a mysterious, awesome, fearful state to mortals. Therefore death as such is weird, because it inspires fear, and the processes of decay that come with death take on that same weirdness due to associative powers. For this reason a skeleton, a grinning skull, or a rotted cadaver is fearful; and if, as in some stories, such a thing is reanimated with unnatural life, fear is born. If decay is not weird, then some of Poe's, Bierce's, Machen's and Lovecraft's best stories are not weird tales. If death and decay and chaos are not weird, then no unnatural transposition of commonplace phenomena can be considered so, for they are simply distortions of matter-of-fact embodiments. Therefore, I fear I must disagree with your critic."

Duane W. Rimel, of Asotin, Washington, writes to the Eyrie: "*Red Gauntlets of Czerni* by Seabury Quinn rose to a most startling and satisfying climax. Jules de Grandin is getting even more versatile. The use of a prosaic electric sweeper as an effective weapon against Tibor Czerni was both startling and unique. Perhaps de Grandin can short-circuit the next evil-doer!"

"I believe your covers to be extremely beautiful, and controversy only proves the point," writes Mary Whitcomb, of Worcester, Massachusetts. "I have never read anything, ever, as weirdly lovely as your reprint in the January issue, *The Woman of the Wood,* by A. Merritt. I have always loved trees, and the author's description of them was an arrow of beauty sent quivering into my heart. I never expect to find another story so exquisite."

B. M. Reynolds, of North Adams, Massachusetts, writes to the Eyrie: "I was

rather disappointed with your December issue, which as a whole was not so good, but your January WEIRD TALES certainly made me forget that 'you done us wrong' the previous month. A. Merritt takes first place with his reprint, *The Woman of the Wood;* a perfect tale of fantasy, splendidly done and written in typical Merritt style. Clark Ashton Smith comes next with *The Weaver in the Vault;* closely followed by *Invaders of the Ice World* by Jack Williamson; and *A Phantom in the Sky,* by Dale Clark, a most unusual and excellently written ghost story. David H. Keller's serial, *The Solitary Hunters,* also promises to be something different and unique. Regarding reprints, please give us soon that horror classic, *In Amundsen's Tent,* by John Martin Leahy; also *The Greatest Gift,* Eli Colter's remarkable tale of reincarnation; and *Bimini,* by Bassett Morgan."

Writes Lex. Morrison, of Philadelphia: "I do not agree with some of your readers regarding nude women on the covers of WEIRD TALES. They are not out of place when accompanied with a touch of horror. The November cover was excellent—Beauty embracing the hideous emblem of Death."

Writes Dan Saults, of Knob Noster, Missouri: "Robert E. Howard in his stories approaches the heights of genius. His pantheon of gods of old is surpassed only by Lord Dunsany. His imagination is as magnificent as Conan's physique. As does everyone, I must pay tribute to Jules de Grandin and his creator, Seabury Quinn. However, in the utterly weird line, H. P. Lovecraft is the master of all living writers."

"I like your magazine," writes Mary Ashley, of Andover, Massachusetts. "I particularly like the stories that have to do with science, invention, surgery, and the mystic and occult. But why not sandwich in a nude man on your covers once in a while? If there are those to whom the nude woman appeals, there must be those to whom a nude man would appeal. After all, God made us male and female, so why be partial?"

A reader from Rutland, Vermont, who signs himself F. J. R., complains in a letter to the Eyrie: "Your cover illustration for *The Red Knife of Hassan* shows a blond damsel in a rather unusual situation, and yet the story itself is radically different from the artist's conception. Seabury Quinn describes Margaret Ditmas as having 'very black hair'—Brundage probably didn't even bother to read the story—a common failing of some illustraters. The much-discussed question of whether or not nude women should be allowed on the cover seems to me to be a matter of taste. Personally I think that you are overdoing it." [The blame in this instance does not rest with the artist, but with the editor. The artist suggested that a blond girl would contrast better with the black background of the cover. We obtained the author's consent to change the girl from a brunette to a blond, but we neglected to make the change in the printer's proof of the story.—THE EDITOR.]

"The cover of the January issue is exceptionally good," writes Lionel Dilbeck, of Wichita, Kansas. "I am one of those who do not like nude women on the covers; but when they are not the predominating figure, they are all right. I like the black backgrounds much better than any of the others you have tried."

Writes F. Alden Dowdy, of Philadelphia: "I see that various opinions are being expressed about your covers and the nude women on them. Personally, I would rather have illustrations of some of the weird parts of a story. It would seem to me to be more fitting."

Alexander Field, of New Rochelle, New York, writes to the Eyrie: "I sincerely

hope you will not let the prudish element among your readers prevent you from having Mr. Brundage give us an occasional nude, or nearly nude, cover when the story to be illustrated warrants it—say, every other month or so; for, when a man can depict such really beautiful women's bodies as Mr. Brundage can, he should be given great encouragement. Few artists can. It was the cover illustrating *The Altar of Melek Taos* that first drew me to your magazine, and I have not missed a month since."

Captain J. Wilmer Benjamin writes from Lewisburg, West Virginia: "One hears that pictures of nude females on magazine covers do increase circulation. But I have to agree with the gentleman who writes about his maiden aunt—after all, as a reader, I would prefer a cover I could show Aunt Petunia. Aunt Petunia is still old-fashioned, and thinks the human form divine should be neither seen nor heard. It is a little bit difficult to make her believe that Lovecraft is a second E. A. Poe, and that many of the weird tales are beautiful and interesting, because she won't investigate after one look at a golden goddess in the all-together. Nude gals are beautiful, but are they art?"

We have received requests for the first two isues of WEIRD TALES, bearing the dates March and April, 1923. If any of you have these two issues, and wish to sell them, we would be glad to have you write to the circulation manager of WEIRD TALES, 840 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, and he will put you in communication with the ones who are seeking those numbers.

Readers, let us know which stories you like best in this number of WEIRD TALES. And if there are any stories you do not like, let us know which ones, and why. Your favorite story in the January WEIRD TALES, as shown by your votes and letters, was the first installment of Dr. David H. Keller's serial, *The Solitary Hunters*. Your second choice was A. Merritt's exquisite fantasy, *The Woman of the Wood*, which was reprinted from WEIRD TALES of eight years ago.

My favorite stories in the March WEIRD TALES are:

Story	Remarks
(1)_____	_____
(2)_____	_____
(3)_____	_____

I do not like the following stories:

(1)_____	Why?_____
(2)_____	_____

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in Weird Tales if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

_____

_____

_____

Coming Next Month

"AT THY command, *ya shaykh!*" said Farrell as he halted some five paces from the Presence.

"Step forward," directed the ancient one. "Look! hast thou seen me before?"

As the smoldering eyes narrowed, Farrell returned the old man's unblinking stare, and strove to remain unperturbed by its intent concentration; but his effort was vain. He felt a sense of futility and weakness creeping over him.

The rotating cluster of prisms now flamed and flashed with an adamantine fire that expanded and contracted and pulsed like a living thing. It seemed now to be glowing between the eyes of Hassan. An overwhelming weariness assailed Farrell.

The old man's voice intoned sonorously, and as from a great distance.

"I am the keeper of the gateway . . . even in the hollow of my hand I hold *al jannat* and its coolness to the eyes. . . . Yea, behold my hand. . . ."

Farrell regarded the outstretched hand of Hassan.

"In the hollow of my hand, even in this hand I hold *al jannat*. . . ."

A mistiness was gathering about Hassan, and his features became obscured so that only his glittering eyes peered through. The outstretched hand was expanding; and strangely enough, it seemed fitting to Farrell that this should be so, and that there should be hazy figures, and clots of greenness appearing in the blankness above the hand. Trees were taking root. Their outlines were hazy, and through their immaterial substance he could just distinguish the jambs of the niche, and the swirling mists that veiled Hassan.

The voice was now murmuring softly and compellingly.

"Even in this hand I hold the Garden . . . I am the keeper and the warden . . . I accept and I reject. . . ."

Then that which in the back of his brain had kept Farrell from utterly succumbing to the sorcery of that murmuring voice and those burning eyes asserted itself, and he knew that it was illusion. As he sought to resist and deny, he felt a terrific impact as of a physical substance. A mighty, implacable will bludgeoned him as with hammer blows. He knew that if he continued assenting he would be for ever enslaved.

"There is no Garden. It is illusion," he asserted to himself, and forced his lips to move and silently enunciate the negation. . . .

You can not afford to miss this remarkable story of a terrific adventure, two ravishingly beautiful girls, occult evil and sudden death in the lair of the hasheesh-eaters. It will begin in the April WEIRD TALES:

SATAN'S GARDEN

By E. HOFFMANN PRICE

—ALSO—

CORSAIRS OF THE COSMOS
By EDMOND HAMILTON

A stupendous story of the Interstellar Patrol—an amazing weird-scientific tale of an invasion from outside the universe.

BLACK THIRST
By C. L. MOORE

Another weird and thrilling tale about Northwest Smith, by the author of "Shambleau"—an astounding story of ultimate horror.

SHADOWS IN THE MOONLIGHT
By ROBERT E. HOWARD

A thrilling weird tale about a desperate, strong-muscled barbarian and the colossal iron statues that stood in a ghastly row in the moonlight—a tale of piracy and red-blooded heroism in the mighty days of yore.

THE DEATH OF MALYGRIS
By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Even in death, the mighty wizard proved himself greater than his peers—a story of weird sorcery, written by a supreme master of fantastic fiction.

THE CANE
By CARL JACOBI

What mad obsession was it that caused the eminently respectable Mr. Grenning suddenly to become a murderous fiend?

April WEIRD TALES Out April 1

Why Weird Tales?

WITH this issue, WEIRD TALES *begins its twelfth year. In place of the Weird Story Reprint this month, we publish the following editorial, which appeared in* WEIRD TALES *in the issue of May, 1924. That editorial was a promise to you, the readers of this magazine. We reprint it here, not only because of its great interest and valuable contents, but also to show that we have kept faith with our readers, as those of you who have followed the magazine from its inception will realize.*

The editorial follows:

UP TO the day the first issue of WEIRD TALES was placed on the stands, stories of the sort you read between these covers each month were taboo in the publishing world. Each magazine had its fixed policy. Some catered to mixed classes of readers, most specialized in certain types of stories, but all agreed in excluding the genuinely weird stories. The greatest weird story and one of the greatest short stories ever written, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue,* would not have stood the ghost of a show in any modern editorial office previous to the launching of WEIRD TALES. Had Edgar Allan Poe produced that masterpiece in this generation he would have searched in vain for a publisher before the advent of this magazine.

And so every issue of this magazine fulfills its mission, printing the kind of stories you like to read—stories which you have no opportunity of reading in other periodicals because of their orthodox editorial policies.

We make no pretension of publishing, or even trying to publish, a magazine that will please everybody. What we have done, and will continue to do, is to gather around us an ever-increasing body of readers who appreciate the weird, the bizarre, the unusual—who recognize true art in fiction.

The writing of the common run of stories today has, unfortunately for American literature, taken on the character of an exact science. Such stories are entirely mechanical, conforming to fixed rules. A good analogy might be found in the music of the electric piano. It is technically perfect, mechanically true, but lacking in expression. As is the case with any art when mechanics is permitted to dominate, the soul of the story is crushed—suffocated beneath a weight of technique. True art—the expression of the soul—is lacking.

The types of stories we have published, and will continue to publish, may be placed under two classifications. The first of these is the story of psychic phenomena or the occult story. These stories are written from three viewpoints: The viewpoint of the spiritualist who believes that such phenomena are produced by spirits of the departed; the scientist, who believes they are either the result of fraud, or may be explained by known, little known, or perhaps unknown phases of natural law; and the neutral investigator, who simply records the facts, lets them speak for themselves, and holds no brief for either side.

The second classification might be termed "highly imaginative stories." These are stories of advancement in the sciences and the arts to which the generation of the writer who creates them has

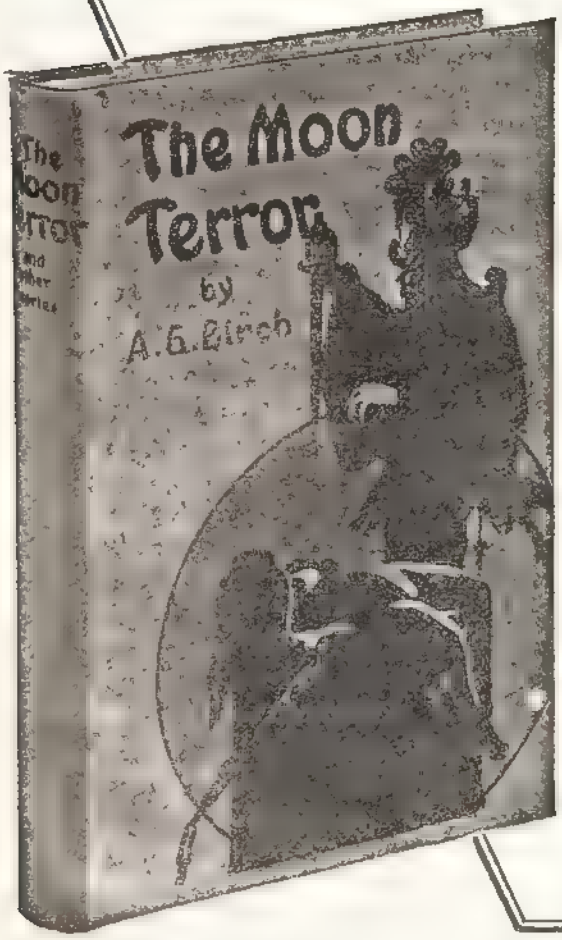
(Please turn to page 396)

MIRACLES OF SCIENCE!

Numerous legends almost as old as the human race represent that the earth once had two moons. Have you ever heard of the Sect of Two Moons? They were the greatest scientists of all time.

At twelve minutes past 3 o'clock a. m., during a lull in the night's aerial business, several of the larger stations of the Western hemisphere began picking up strange signals out of the ether. They were faint and ghostly, as if coming from a vast distance. *It was as if some phantom were whispering through the ether in the language of another planet.*

The Making of Another Moon!



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For a limited time, the publishers of WEIRD TALES are giving this book away with each six months' subscription to the magazine. Simply send $1.50, the regular six months' subscription price for WEIRD TALES, and this book is yours without further cost. You receive the magazine for six months and this book is sent to you free of charge.

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WEIRD TALES

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I enclose $1.50. Send at once, postage prepaid, the book "The Moon Terror," and enter my subscription to WEIRD TALES for six months to begin with the April issue. It is understood this $1.50 is payment in full.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

(Continued from page 394)

not attained. All writers of such stories are prophets, and in the years to come, many of these prophecies will come true.

There are a few people who sniff at such stories. They delude themselves with the statement that they are too practical to read such stuff. We can not please such readers, nor do we aim to do so. A man for whom this generation has found no equal in his particular field of investigation, none other than the illustrious Huxley, wrote a suitable answer for them long ago. He said: "Those who refuse to go beyond fact rarely get as far as fact."

Writers of highly imaginative fiction have, in times past, drawn back the veil of centuries, allowing their readers to look at the wonders of the present. True, these visions were often distorted, as by a mirror with a curved surface, but just as truly were they actual reflections of the present. It is the mission of WEIRD TALES to find present-day writers who have this faculty, so that our readers may glimpse the future—may be vouchsafed visions of the wonders that are to come.

Looking back over the vast sea of literature that has been produced since man began to record his thoughts, we find two types predominating—two types that have lived up to the present and will live on into the future: the weird story and the highly imaginative story. The greatest writers of history have been at their best when producing such stories: Homer, Shakespeare, Milton, Dante, Irving, Hawthorne, Poe, Verne, Dickens, Maeterlinck, Doyle, Wells, and scores of other lesser lights. Their weird and highly imaginative stories will live for ever.

Shakespeare gave forceful expression to the creed of writers of the weird and highly imaginative, when he wrote the oft-quoted saying: "There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

The writer of the highly imaginative story intuitively knows of the existence of these things, and endeavors to search them out. He has an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. He is at once the scientist, the philosopher, and the poet. He evolves fancies from known facts, and new and startling facts are in turn evolved from the fancies. For him, in truth, as for no others less gifted, "Stone walls do not a prison make." His ship of imagination will carry him the four thousand miles to the center of the earth, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea,* on a journey to another planet millions of miles distant, or on a trip through the universe, measured only in millions of light-years, with equal facility. Material obstacles can not stay his progress. He laughs at those two bogies which have plagued mankind from time immemorial, time and space: things without beginning and without end, which man is vainly trying to measure; things that have neither length, breadth nor thickness, yet to which men would ascribe definite limits.

To the imaginative writer, the upper reaches of the ether, the outer limits of the galactic ring, the great void that gapes beyond, and the infinity of universes that may, for all we know, lie still further on, are as accessible as his own garden. He flies to them in the ship of his imagination in less time than it takes a bee to flit from one flower to another on the same spike of a delphinium.

Some of the stories now being published in WEIRD TALES will live for ever. Men, in the progressive ages to come, will wonder how it was possible that writers of the crude and uncivilized age known

(Please turn to page 398)

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The author offers for a limited time to send this amazing treatise to readers of Weird Tales free of cost or obligation. It explains how you may receive this revolutionary teaching in your own home, and reveals the astounding secret, which, mastered, can enable you within the next few months to increase your earning power, attract new friends and make your visions of achievement, health and happiness come true. For your free copy, address Psycho-Logic Institute, Box 98, Dept. 8-E, San Diego, California.

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(Continued from page 396)

as the Twentieth Century could have had foreknowledge of the things that will have, by that time, come to pass. They will marvel, as they marvel even now at the writings of Poe and Verne.

It has always been the human desire to experience new emotions and sensations without actual danger. A tale of horror is told for its own sake, and becomes an end in itself. It is appreciated most by those who are secure from peril.

Using the term in a wide sense, horror stories probably began with the magnificent story of the *Writing on the Wall at Belshazzar's Feast.* Following this were the *Book of Job,* the legends of the *Deluge* and the *Tower of Babel,* and *Saul's Visit to the Woman of Endor.* Byron once said the latter was the best ghost story ever written.

The ancient Hebrews used the element of fear in their writings to spur their heroes to superhuman power or to instill a moral truth. The sun stands still in the heavens that Joshua may prevail over his enemies.

The beginning of the English novel during the middle of the Eighteenth Century brought to light Fielding, Smollett, Sterne and several others. Since this time terror has never ceased to be used as a motive in fiction. This period marked the end of the Gothic romance whose primary appeal was to women readers. Situations fraught with terror are frequent in *Jane Eyre.* The Brontës, however, never used the supernatural element to increase tension. Theirs are the terrors of actual life. Wilkie Collins wove elaborate plots of hair-raising events. Bram Stoker, Richard Marsh and Sax Rohmer do likewise. Conan Doyle realized that darkness and loneliness place us at the mercy of terror and he worked artfully on our fear of the unknown. The works of Rider Haggard combine strangeness, wonder, mystery and horror, as do those of Verne, Hichens, Blackwood, Conrad, and others.

Charles Brockden Brown was the first American novelist to introduce supernatural occurrences and then trace them to natural causes. Like Mrs. Radcliffe, he was at the mercy of a conscience which forbade him to introduce specters in which he himself did not believe. Brown was deeply interested in morbid psychology and he took delight in tracing the working of the brain in times of emotional stress. His best works are *Edgar Huntly, Wieland* and *Ormond.*

The group of "Strange Stories by a Nervous Gentleman" in *Tales of a Traveler* proves that Washington Irving was well versed in ghostly lore. He was wont to summon ghosts and spirits at will but could not refrain from receiving them in a jocose, irreverent mood. However, in the *Story of the German Student* he strikes a note of real horror.

Hawthorne was not a man of morose and gloomy temper. An irresistible impulse drove him toward the somber and gloomy. In his notebook he says: "I used to think that I could imagine all the passions, all the feelings and states of the heart and mind, but how little did I know! Indeed, we are but shadows, we are not endowed with real life, but all that seems most real about us is but the thinnest shadow of a dream—till the heart be touched."

The weird story of *The Hollow of the Three Hills,* the gloomy legend of *Ethan Brand* and the ghostly *White Old Maid* are typical of Hawthorne's mastery of the bizarre. His introduction of witches into *The Scarlet Letter* and of mesmerism into *The Blithedale Romance* shows that he was preoccupied with the terrors of magic and of the invisible world.

Hawthorne was concerned with mournful reflections, not frightful events. The mystery of death, not its terror, fascinated him. He never startled you with physical horror, save possibly in *The House of the Seven Gables.* With grim and bitter irony Hawthorne mocks and taunts the dead body of Judge Jaffery Pyncheon until the ghostly pageantry of the dead Pyncheons—including at last Judge Jaffery himself with the fatal crimson stain on his neckcloth—fades away with the coming of daylight.

Edgar Allan Poe was penetrating the trackless regions of terror while Hawthorne was toying with spectral forms and "dark ideas." Where Hawthorne would have shrunk back, repelled and disgusted, Poe, wildly exhilarated by the anticipation of a new and excruciating thrill, forced his way onward. Both Poe and Hawthorne were fascinated by the thought of death. The hemlock and cypress overshadowed Poe night and day and he describes death accompanied by its direst physical and mental agonies. Hawthorne wrote with finished perfection, unerringly choosing the right word; Poe experimented with language, painfully acquiring a studied form of expression which was remarkably effective at times. In his *Mask of the Red Death* we are forcibly impressed with the skilful arrangement of words, the alternation of long and short sentences, the use of repetition, and the deliberate choice of epithets.

But enough of Poe. His works are immortal and stand today as the most widely read of any American author. The publishers of WEIRD TALES hope they will be instrumental in discovering or uncovering some American writer who will leave to posterity what Poe and Hawthorne have bequeathed to the present generation. Perhaps in the last year we

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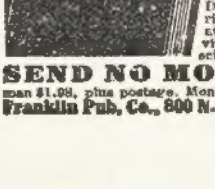

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have been instrumental in furnishing an outlet to writers whose works would not find a ready market in the usual channels. The reception accorded us has been cordial and we feel that we will survive. We dislike to predict the future of the horror story. We believe its powers are not yet exhausted. The advance of science proves this. It will lead us into unexplored labyrinths of terror, and the human desire to experience new emotions will always be with us.

Doctor Frank Crane says: "What I write is my tombstone." And again—"As for me, let my bones and flesh be burned, and the ashes dropped in the moving waters, and if my name shall live at all, let it be found among books, the only garden of forget-me-nots, the only human device for perpetuating this personality."

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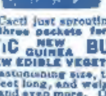

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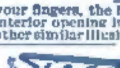

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Place a very small amount of this powder on the back of your hand and blow it into the air, and watch them sneeze without knowing the reason why. It is most amazing to hear their remarks, as they never suspect the real source, but think they have caught it one from another. Between the laughing and sneezing you yourself will be having the time of your life. For parties, political meetings, car rides, or any place at all where there is a gathering of people, it is the greatest joke out. **PRICE 10c, 3 for 25c, 75c per dozen. Shipped by Express.** Not Prepaid.

COMICAL MOTTO RINGS

Lots of harmless fun and amusement wearing these rings. Made in platinoid finish (to resemble platinum), with wording on enameloid, as illustrated. **Price 25c. ea. Postpaid.**

Good Luck RING

Very striking, quaint and uncommon. Oxidized gunmetal finish; skull and crossbones design; two brilliant flashing imitation rubies or emeralds sparkle out of the eyes. Said to bring good luck to the wearer. **PRICE 25c Postpaid**

FORTUNE TELLING BY CARDS

Dice, dominoes, crystal, etc. Tells meaning of every card. Different methods explained. Crammed full with complete information. **PRICE 10c postpaid.**

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ALL GIVEN

BOYS - GIRLS, Look Here Quick

GIVEN— SEND NO MONEY

Send Name and Address. Big air-cooled movie, adjustable lamp socket, rewind and take up wheels. Uses big film, includes: 7-foot cord, show bills, tickets, metal slide and still pictures, U-Draw-em slide novelty, film and instructions. SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE beautifully colored art pictures, suitable for framing, with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box and remit as per new big premium plan book. We are reliable—Our 39th year. Be first. Write for dozen Salve or Mail COUPON NOW.

Big Cash Commission GIVEN

WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. WT-76, Tyrone, Pa.

GIVEN

COMPLETE ELECTRIC RADIO or BIG CASH Commissions

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Send Name and Address. Operates on either AC or DC, picks up police calls and regular broadcasts. Wonderful selectivity and sensitivity, fine tone, compact. Five tubes, high quality Dynamic speaker included. Shielded chassis and 25 ft. antenna. It's unusual. SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE beautifully colored art picture, suitable for framing, with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box and remit, as per new big premium plan book. We are reliable—Our 39th year. Be first. Write for dozen SALVE or MAIL COUPON NOW. WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. WT-76, Tyrone, Pa.

BOYS! REPEATING RIFLE GIVEN

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Holds 12 22-cal. shells, good sights, walnut finish. It's great! SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE beautifully colored art pictures, suitable for framing, with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box, and remit as per new big premium plan book. Other choice Rifles, premiums or spending money. We are reliable—Our 39th year. Be first. Write for dozen SALVE or MAIL COUPON NOW. WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. WT-76, Tyrone, Pa.

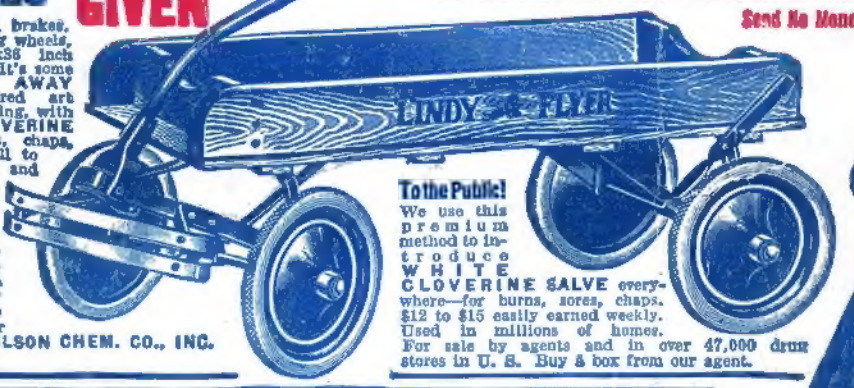
BOYS - GIRLS GIVEN

Just Look! Real bumpers, brakes, 10-inch disc roller bearing wheels, large balloon tires, 16x36 inch hardwood or metal body—it's some wagon! SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE beautifully colored art pictures, suitable for framing, with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box and remit as per new big premium plan book. Other choice wagons, premiums or spending money. Old Cloverine agents please order. New agents wanted too. We are reliable—Our 39th year—Be first—Write for dozen SALVE or MAIL COUPON NOW. Easy for others, easy for you. WILSON CHEM. CO., INC. Dept. WT-76, Tyrone, Pa.

1934 Model LINDY FLYER

or Choice of CASH Commission

Send No Money



To the Public!

We use this premium method to introduce WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE everywhere—for burns, sores, chaps. $12 to $15 easily earned weekly. Used in millions of homes. For sale by agents and in over 47,000 drug stores in U. S. Buy a box from our agent.

Send Name and Address.—Latest Cherry Blossom design, first quality and modern—green or pink colors. Extremely beautiful! SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE beautifully colored art pictures, suitable for framing, with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box and remit as per new big premium plan book. Other choice sets, premiums or spending money. We are reliable—Our 39th year—Be first. Write for dozen SALVE or MAIL COUPON NOW. WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. WT-76, Tyrone, Pa.

GIVEN

LADIES!

24-Pc. GLASS Set or BIG CASH Commission

GIVEN

SEND NO MONEY

BOYS, LADIES, GIRLS Wrist Watch or BIG CASH Commission GIVEN

Send Name and Address. Latest white carved case, adjustable bracelet, 6-jewel lever movement, radiant dial. It's gorgeous! SIMPLY GIVE AWAY FREE beautifully colored art pictures, suitable for framing, with our famous WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box and remit as per new big premium plan book. Other watches, premiums or spending money. We are reliable—Our 39th year—Be first. Write for dozen SALVE or MAIL COUPON NOW. WILSON CHEM. CO., INC., Dept. WT-76, Tyrone, Pa.

CUT OUT AND MAIL TODAY

Wilson Chem. Co., Inc., Dept. WT-76, Tyrone, Pa.

Gentlemen: Please send me 12 beautiful art pictures with 12 boxes WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE to sell at 25c a box (giving picture FREE). I will remit within 30 days, select a premium or keep cash commission as per new premium plan book sent with order, postage paid.

Name _____

R.F.D. St. or Box No. _____

TOWN _____ STATE _____

(Print last name in blocks below) Date _____

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